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**A new systemic and socio-political interpretation of region and family in I promessi sposi, The Return of the Native and La Terre  
functional and dysfunctional patterns in the journey towards autonomy**

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**A New Systemic and Socio-Political Interpretation of Region and Family in *I promessi sposi*, *The Return of the Native* and *La Terre*: Functional and Dysfunctional Patterns in the Journey towards Autonomy**

by

**OLIMPIA BARLETTA**

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of  
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## Abstract

Up to now, most scholarly work on nineteenth-century regionalist literature has characterised it as sentimental, exoticising, and focalised on the detailed description of customs and traditions of a specifically delimited geographical area. This is defined as often crystallised, fixed in time, static and cut-off from the wider world. This thesis sets out to reassess the concept of region as a literary geography through an innovative transnational, comparative perspective that adopts a three-fold approach: first, studying the relationships and forms of communication and miscommunication that develop among individuals who inhabit the region; second, analysing the power dynamics and social hierarchies that result from them; and finally, examining how individual choices and behaviour impact the wider social sphere and ‘produce’ regional space. I have chosen to concentrate on regional space as depicted in Alessandro Manzoni’s *I promessi sposi*, Thomas Hardy’s *The Return of the Native* and Emile Zola’s *La Terre* through the lenses of systemic theory developed by Austrian biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy, and later re-elaborated in the psychological field by Argentinian psychiatrist Salvador Minuchin. My aim is to show how the region is constructed as involved in a functional or dysfunctional relationship towards characters, similarly to how a family operates towards its members, allowing or hindering their movements and their attempts to achieve autonomy.

Chapter One redefines the concept of region and introduces the Minunchian family structures. I then discuss the historical background of the three national contexts (Italy, Britain and France) in which the chosen authors write. Chapter Two examines in more detail the metaphorical correspondence between region and family in Lombardy, Egdon Heath and La Beauce, using Minuchin’s theories, in a constant zooming of photographic lenses from a microcosmic level, that is the family *stricto sensu* as represented in the novels, to a macrocosmic one, that is the regional territory in which these families live and interact. Furthermore, I demonstrate that mobility within and beyond the region determines whether a familial and regional system can be seen as functional

or dysfunctional. Here, the journey becomes the key narrative trope writers use to trace their characters' path towards either integration or escape from the enclosed regional boundaries. Chapter Three takes a different perspective and looks at the political, socio-economic and religious aspects of regional life and history in the specific national context of each novel. Here, I contest traditional visions in both literary and cultural discourse of the region as a static entity in time and space.

In conclusion, I outline the results obtained, which show how nineteenth-century regionalism is much more than condescending stereotypes, nostalgic sentimentalism and local colour. As exemplified by Manzoni, Hardy and Zola, an interest in regional spaces permeates even the dominant form of the realist novel and manifests itself in their three novels as a complex engagement with the region not as an immobile landscape but as an entity endowed with entropic energy in constant transformation.

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## **Chapter One: Nations, Regions, and Families**

### **Research Purpose**

My thesis focuses on the analysis of three nineteenth-century European novels through the lens of regionalism. The novels in question are Alessandro Manzoni's *I promessi sposi* (1825-27; 1840-42), Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* (1878), and Emile Zola's *La Terre* (1887).<sup>1</sup> This dissertation sets out to question the conventional understanding of region as a static, empty landscape cut-off from the world. I shall compare the regional space in Manzoni, Hardy and Zola to a family verifying whether it behaves in a functional or dysfunctional way, allowing or hindering its components' psychological growth and autonomy. The journey, both as physical mobility outwards and as psychodynamic separation from the original family will represent the key of this analysis. In addition, I will verify whether the connection between characters and territory is applicable also to the dyad nation and region through the socio-economical, political and religious background the authors present.

My methodology in this thesis is grounded in the psychodynamic, more specifically in the systemic theories produced by Austrian biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy, and by their later psychological re-elaboration by Argentinian psychiatrist Salvador Minuchin. This framework allows me to analyse the novels' characters not only as individuals, but also as part of systems. My choice of texts, as we shall see later in this chapter, aims at reimagining the regionalist canon by

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<sup>1</sup> Alessandro Manzoni, *I promessi sposi* (Milan: Mondadori, 1990). Alessandro Manzoni, *The Betrothed*, trans. by Bruce Penman (London: Penguin, 1972). Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). Emile Zola, *La Terre* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1974). Emile Zola, *Earth*, trans. by Brian Nelson and Julie Rose (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

comparing three authors which are not traditionally considered as regionalist, with the exception of Hardy. Although it is generally considered the first great ‘Italian novel’, Manzoni’s *I promessi sposi* plays out entirely in the regional space of Lombardy, with a final foray into the Venetian Republic. As we shall discuss in due course, Manzoni’s contribution to the linguistic and cultural idea of Italy is coded in regionalist terms, and is sensitive to his characters’ profound sense of displacement as they are forced to leave their native village and integrate in a new socio-political space. Zola, on the other hand, is primarily associated with the Naturalist poetics he helped to define, which is apparently remote from the sentimental and moralising tone of much regionalist literature. However, in *La Terre*, Zola explores concepts such as the human rootedness in a territory and the desire to defend it against external contaminations, which are key features of regionalist texts. Finally, these same themes of belonging, dependency and closure to external influences reach their peak in Hardy’s *The Return of the Native* where the region rises to the role of protagonist intervening in the characters’ lives and determining their fate.

Before proceeding, it appears important to underline the reasons behind my decision to study the region in texts which are not traditionally considered regionalist. What I found is that the region is not only portrayed in regional narratives, but it is also present in more complex and of larger-breadth literary genres, such as the novel; I believe it to be pivotal to study how the region’s representation changes in a different genre. I aim to bring to light a reading of the region present outside of the typical regional narratives in order to give an original contribution to the nineteenth-century scholarly panorama: on the one hand, as we shall see later in this chapter, my choice of texts such as *I promessi sposi*, *The Return of the Native* and *La Terre* shall confirm the limitations of the celebratory mode of regionalist writing; on the other hand the analysis of region in the literary genre of the novel rather than in the typical regionalist narratives will enable me to reconsider the connection that sociologists and scholars have defined between novel and nation-



state.<sup>2</sup> According to Timothy Brennan the nineteenth-century novel, thanks to its concept of realism, is the genre via which the national situation of a specific social class or problematic is presented, ‘bringing together the high and the low’.<sup>3</sup> In fact, Franco Moretti adds that human beings could ‘grasp most of their habitats’, namely villages, cities, valleys, even the sky, as they could concretely see them and as these could, for example, be rendered in paintings.<sup>4</sup> It was not as easy to depict the nation, so the nation found in the novel the ‘only symbolic form that could represent it’.<sup>5</sup> In this respect, Brennan confirms that the novel genre accompanied the rise of nations by resembling their structure, namely a clearly bordered ensemble of languages and style, joining ‘the newspaper as major vehicle of the national print media (...) and its manner of representation allowed people to imagine the special community that was the nation’.<sup>6</sup> Although in *I promessi sposi*, *The Return of the Native* and *La Terre* we shall see a focus on a specific social class and a specific set of problems, these seem to be circumscribed inside the geographical space of a region, and seem to lack an outspoken regard towards their national contexts. Therefore, it shall be interesting to investigate whether the connection between the novel genre and the nation-state persists despite the novels’ regional settings and consequently produces a representation of the region not completely secluded from the nation it belongs to (typical instead of regionalist narratives), or whether it is severed.

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<sup>2</sup> See Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel 1800-1900* (London: Verso, 1998). Timothy Brennan, *Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> Brennan, *Salman Rushdie and the Third World*, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel*, p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>6</sup> Brennan, *Salman Rushdie and the Third World*, p. 9.

Before looking in detail at each text, this introduction will shed light on the concept of ‘region’ in the context of political geography, history and literary studies, clarifying the theoretical and methodological framework of my study. In addition to that, I will trace how and why regionalism developed as a political and cultural phenomenon, giving specific historical background on Italy, Britain and France. The discussion starts by providing a definition of region. Looking at etymology, we find that the Latin term *regio* signifying ‘direction, line, boundary’ entered English and most Romance languages in the fourteenth century, taking on the new meaning of a ‘group of territories showing a common character’.<sup>7</sup> In this case, the etymology of the word appears rather vague in the definition it gives of region. Before disturbing scholars for help, we can call to our aid the language dictionaries to investigate whether they propose a more precise definition for modern usage, and whether this is different in the three languages. The OED offers as the primary definition of region ‘any large portion of the earth's surface considered as defined or distinguished from adjacent areas in some way, as by culture, government, topography, climate, fauna or flora, etc.’ This confirms the vagueness of the historical meaning with regards to dimension and borders, as well as the emphasis on a region’s perceived unity and distinctness vis-à-vis neighbouring areas. The ambiguity of scale persists in the political and administrative sphere, for which two contradictory definitions are offered: on the one hand, the region is ‘an area of the world encompassing several neighbouring states’, while on the other hand it is ‘a subdivision of a larger geographical or political unit [...] to form a system of local government’. We see thus that the region can be understood both as transnational, namely larger than the nation or cutting across different nation states, and as local, so subordinated to a larger political entity of which it forms a part. A further specification that is especially relevant to the cultural and literary sphere is the British usage of ‘regions’ in the plural, which indicates ‘the parts of a country outside the capital’.

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<sup>7</sup> ‘Region, n.’ in *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017) <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/161281?redirectedFrom=region>> [accessed 8 May 2017].

Here, region is defined sharply in opposition to the political and cultural centre of the nation, and it is aligned to the often pejorative notion of ‘provincial’.<sup>8</sup>

In terms of the Italian definition, the *Dizionario della lingua Italiana* by Giacomo Devoto and Gian Carlo Oli also adds an administrative distinction:

Ciascuna delle circoscrizioni in cui è diviso il territorio nazionale per lo più con caratteri storici, linguistici e culturali distinti, riconosciute dalla Costituzione Italiana quali enti territoriali autonomi con poteri amministrativi

The constituencies, each with its own historical, linguistic and cultural characteristics, in which the national territory is divided, recognised by the Italian Constitution as independent territorial entities with administrative powers.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, concerning French, in the *Trésor de la langue française*, the first meaning of the word ‘region’ is that of an ‘espace géographique’ a ‘portion de territoire plus ou moins étendue et délimitée, formant une unité constituée, soit par son histoire et ses caractères humains ou ethnologiques’ (‘geographical space, a portion of territory more or less extended and delimited, forming a unity constituted by either its history and people or its ethnological characteristics’).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> ‘Regione, n.’ in *Il dizionario della lingua italiana*, ed. by Giacomo Devoto and Gian Carlo Oli (Florence: Le Monnier, 1990), p. 1571. All translations from the Italian are mine unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Région, n.’ in *TLF Informatisé* (Paris : Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1971) <<http://stella.atilf.fr/Dendien/scripts/tlfiv5/visusel.exe?590;s=3743463495;r=3;nat=;sol=0>> [Accessed 21 February 2017]. All translations from the French are mine unless otherwise indicated.

It appears that the Italian and French definitions of region share a more political value compared to the British English. As we shall see later in more detail, especially in the case of Italy, the political and territorial unification of 1861 brought together distinct cultural and linguistic spaces, but it never fully succeeded in creating a perfectly homogenous centralised nation.<sup>11</sup> In fact, according to Roberto Dainotto, in France and Italy, ‘the regions felicitously blossom against political inventions, against historical repressions and national inventions’.<sup>12</sup> The conflict between centralising attempts and the stubborn survival of particularism characterised another key phase of nation-building in the form of the drafting of the Italian Constitution of 1948. As Lucio Gambi has shown, far from solving the problem, the creation of regional governments was a top-down process that carved out purely administrative entities, often failing to take into account pre-existing linguistic, social and cultural differences.<sup>13</sup>

By contrast, in Britain the concept of region appears to be less contentious, being linked to the neutral meaning of territory within the state with no claims to political recognition. However, we must be careful not to present a frictionless picture with regards to British regionalism; in fact, as made clear in the works of Raymond Williams, Glen Cavaliero, and Gianni Rovera the idea of region is linked inextricably to that of landscape and countryside, and it is thus involved in the nineteenth-century debate about industrialisation and urbanisation and presents a specific social

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<sup>11</sup> This concept is analysed in section ‘Italy’ below.

<sup>12</sup> Roberto Dainotto, *Place in Literature: Regions, Cultures, Communities* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 2000), p. 20.

<sup>13</sup> Lucio Gambi, ‘Le regioni negli stati preunitari’, in *Studi di storia medievale e moderna per Ernesto Sestan vol. II età moderna*, ed. by Leo S. Olschki (Florence: Olschki, 1980), pp. 885-902 (p. 889).

configuration.<sup>14</sup> French and Italian regional literature tends to focus on a specific group of regional dwellers, namely the peasant classes (as we can see in Manzoni and Zola). In the British context instead, writers such as Jane Austen and later Thomas Hardy and Elizabeth Gaskell concentrate on the middle and upper-middle classes who, although they might reside in the regional countryside and feel a sense of belonging, are not rooted there but maintain strong links and identification with urban centres. As we shall see, in Britain the region is defined as ‘a distinctive area that is predominantly rural in character’, in opposition to urban and industrial environments.<sup>15</sup> This is true to some extent in the French and Italian contexts as well, but it is important nonetheless to bear in mind the conceptual distinction between countryside and region. The region can indeed include rural areas, but cannot simply be equated to the countryside or to an empty landscape for aesthetic contemplation. As this thesis will emphasise, provincial towns are central to the cultural imagination and identity of regions, and they introduce a higher degree of social and economic complexity and cultural autonomy than is commonly understood. Moreover, in the idyllic landscapes of the region the nineteenth-century realism discovers ploughed fields where peasants toil.

What is striking is that the region remains in all three linguistic contexts a space whose boundaries are not clearly defined. Armand Frémont calls it a space in between ‘less extended than the nation and the great space of civilisation, but wider than the social space of a group’.<sup>16</sup> For

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<sup>14</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Country and The City* (London: Penguin, 1973), pp. 1-5. See also Glen Cavaliero, *The Rural Tradition in the English Novel 1900-1939* (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. 3. And Gianni Rovera, *Poetica dello spazio e dimensione umana in Thomas Hardy* (Turin: G. Giappichelli, 1982), p. 9.

<sup>15</sup> William John Keith, *Regions of the Imagination, the Development of the British Rural Fiction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), p. 11.

<sup>16</sup> Armand Frémont, *La Région, espace vécu* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1976), p. 138.

Frémont, the region is distinct from the nation and often viewed in opposition to the capital city, and it is constructed as an environment outside of time, untouched by history, from which no one born there can really escape, and no stranger can enter. Dainotto touches on this last concept when he claims that ‘region is the commonplace of what has never been debased by industry, capital, and above all immigration’, and so in these terms it becomes an exclusionary place, an imagined idyll, or *locus amoenus*, undisturbed by modernity or newcomers.<sup>17</sup> In a more positive vein, Alfredo Sisca has argued that the region is a third alternative beyond the dichotomy of provincialism and nationalism, and culturally it functions as the repository of history and tradition against the innovations emanating from the centre.<sup>18</sup> Referring to this last aspect, Harold John Massingham claims that to depict such a region is to ‘present a work of art’.<sup>19</sup> The region appears to be an aesthetic object, a place untouched by modernity and pollution produced by industrialisation, where people’s ways of living goes back to their ‘original’ purity.<sup>20</sup> Although I share Frémont, Dainotto, Sisca and Massingham’s conceptualisations, my interpretation of the regional space distances from them to move closer to Edmund William Gilbert who talks of a sort of ‘personality’ of the region.<sup>21</sup> This concept of the region as possessing a personality and not simply being a background screen is significant to my idea of how regional space behaves in the novels, as I shall demonstrate later in the chapter.

What appears interesting is how different the dictionary definitions of region are from the more conceptual ones produced by scholars of regionalism. As we saw earlier, in the former case,

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<sup>17</sup> Dainotto, *Place in Literature*, pp. 23, 29.

<sup>18</sup> Alfredo Sisca, *Cultura e letteratura, rapporti tra cultura regionale e nazionale: Manzoni, Verga, Fogazzaro* (Ravenna: A. Longo, 1970), p. 46.

<sup>19</sup> Harold John Massingham, *Remembrance: an Autobiography* (London: Batsford, 1942), p. 81.

<sup>20</sup> Dainotto, *Place in Literature*, p. 23.

<sup>21</sup> Edmund William Gilbert, ‘The Idea of a Region’, *Geography*, 40 (1960), 156-180 (p. 169).

the concept of region appears somewhat vague, and it acquires a sense of unlimited geographical space, more or less politically influenced. Moreover, the dictionaries provide – as one would expect – a more objective definition of region as territory, rather than region as a complex space produced by culture. Instead, scholarly conceptualisation of the word loses this limitlessness in favour of its definition as a deeply enclosed entity in terms of national ideology and cultural development.

My concept of region, thus, acquires multiple meanings that are deeply embedded in national ideologies and cultural responses to modernity. This area of ill-defined boundaries is conceptualised as antithetical or complementary to the city and the nation as a whole. It includes the countryside's landscape but contrary to what we would expect it does not exclude everything else (minor urban centres, relations of production). It is sometimes imagined as the original core of a state (e.g. England – properly referred to as a nation) or as a constitutive part of this unity (e.g. Lombardy, La Beauce), and as such it holds its history, language, old customs and tradition. Often, its inhabitants feel a strong sense of reverence and belonging to the region. The aspect of regional imagination that I am interested in analysing in this thesis lies precisely at the intersection between two distinct ways of conceptualising regional space: on the one hand, the region as a lived place produced by specific social, economic, and cultural interactions, and on the other the region as a mythical realm untouched by historical change. In order to make sense of these competing modes of representation, my study of Manzoni, Hardy and Zola will draw attention to a key symbolic association that defines the region, namely that with the family. As this thesis will demonstrate, nineteenth-century regional novels do not only see the region as an immobile background or unproblematic landscape. The region becomes one of the protagonists of the narrative, as we shall see especially in Hardy, as it plays a central function in the plot. For this reason, I propose to analyse regional space not only as a specific locale, as scholars have done until now, but also, by metonymy, as a system of inter-personal relations.

Robert Tally, himself a scholar invested in reimagining the region, talks of a ‘spirit of place’, which ‘informs, if not directs and controls the ideas of the people who live in that place’.<sup>22</sup> This concept of directing and controlling the ideas of the people who live in the place is pivotal to what I too believe the region does in *I promessi sposi*, *The Return of the Native* and *La Terre*. In fact, similarly to what Edward Casey has claimed, the region serves to ‘implace, to anchor and orient’ a person, ‘finally becoming an integral part of [one’s] identity.’<sup>23</sup> Unlike Tally, I do not interpret the spirit of place as some sort of metaphysical or quasi-scientific spirit, but I do believe that the regional space can be analysed through the study of the types of relationships and communication that develop among individuals who inhabit it, through the hierarchical roles and social structures that result from them and through the reading of how the behaviour of one individual influences that of others. In other words, I aim to observe the regional space through the lens of systemic theory. According to its creator, Ludwig von Bertalanffy, a system is a group of unities in reciprocal interaction with themselves and the space in which they reside.<sup>24</sup> At a microcosmic level, a family is the unity made of its members and their relations to one another and to the space they inhabit. Analogously, at a more macrocosmic level, the regional space can be observed as a system made of unities, families and individuals, in relationships with one another and with the surrounding environment. The concept of regional space thus acquires the symbolism of a delimited space in which human beings are born, grow up, relate to one another and to the ambience, leave, return to, or remain all their life, just as it would normally happen in a family system.

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<sup>22</sup> Robert Tally Jr., *Spatiality* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 81.

<sup>23</sup> Edward Casey, *Getting Back Into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 23.

<sup>24</sup> Ludwig von Bertalanffy, *General System Theory* (New York: George Braziller Inc., 1969), p. 206.



This is the theoretical framework that structures my interpretation of the region as depicted by Manzoni, Zola and Hardy, and it is towards this original re-imagination of region that I wish to orientate my research. I argue that the idea of family can work as a better way to conceptualise the region compared to Tally's spirit of place. The latter appears to be presented as a spiritual entity inside the region, but still detached from it. In addition, it observes and directs the lives of the region's inhabitants, but this leads to the idea that regional life coordination is in the hands of a *super partes* guide. Instead, the regional space, in parallel to the family system as described in the theories of Donald deAvila Jackson, is a self-governed entity with laws and regulations established by its own members.<sup>25</sup>

Paraphrasing Marisa Malagoli Togliatti, a family is the primary relational system in the process of the individualisation, growth, and change of its members.<sup>26</sup> The family system's main task is to ensure and encourage its components' individual development and independence. In fact, as suggested by psychiatrist Murray Bowen, this process of self-individualisation starts from the assumption that a family is an active system in constant transformation, which guarantees its members both a sense of belonging to the original family, and the ability to separate from it.<sup>27</sup> Following Bowen, it is precisely when a person belongs to a sufficiently defined and cohesive family group that he or she can progressively develop his or her individual self and separate to live autonomously.<sup>28</sup> According to Salvador Minuchin, separation and independence can be achieved if the family system is characterised by: flexibility, when a family is an open socio-cultural system in

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<sup>25</sup> Donald deAvila Jackson, 'The study of the Family', *Family Process*, 4 (1965), 1-20 (p. 6).

<sup>26</sup> Marisa Malagoli Togliatti, *La psicologia della famiglia, sviluppi e tendenze* (Milan: Francoangeli, 1996), p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> Murray Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice* (Lanham: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, 1978), p. 503.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 503.

progress, autonomy, which is the basis of the relationships between members of the system, and possibility of change, when the family adapts to a new situation and reorganises its structure – influenced by both the internal and the external system.<sup>29</sup> This is done in order to maintain continuity and ensure the psychosocial growth of the family members. If a family is able to comply with Minuchin's criteria the resulting system will be a functional one, with adequate rules, roles and communication, called 'boundaries'.<sup>30</sup> This type of system is able to maintain its homeostasis by adapting to its internal and external exigencies. Furthermore, a functional family encourages the individual's growth and the progressive separation from his or her original nucleus to build his or her own new life. If, instead, this pattern does not occur, the family will develop into a dysfunctional system, which can be 'enmeshed' when its boundaries, i.e. communication, information, and the roles of each member, are disordered and confused; conversely, it can be 'disengaged' when these boundaries are too rigid and do not allow emotional and relational exchange either inside among its members, or outside of the system, and its components' autonomy tends to be only apparent.<sup>31</sup> This autonomy, in fact, is an indication of the scant level of contact between family members. Both the enmeshed and the disengaged are immobile systems, as they both inhibit any possibility of change or individual psycho-physic development and growth. It must be underlined that such types of family represent 'ideal types', in that most families can actually present within themselves both enmeshed and disengaged areas.

I argue that the three regions present in the Italian, British and French novels can be seen in light of the types of family conceptualised by Minunchin in his theories.<sup>32</sup> As we shall see in more

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<sup>29</sup> Salvador Minuchin, *Families and Family Therapy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), p. 12.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>31</sup> See note 30 above.

<sup>32</sup> I investigate this concept in Chapter Two below.

detail in the following chapters, in Manzoni's *I promessi sposi*, Lombardy acts as a loose and functional family structure, allowing its members to leave the nest (due to the dangerous situation they find themselves in), to experience other spaces and finally to settle in the one they recognise as being most adequate for them.<sup>33</sup> The Egdon Heath region in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* can be compared to an omnipresent, centripetal family. In fact, Hardy's region seems to allow one of its members, Clym, to leave and go abroad but only for a limited period of time.<sup>34</sup> In fact, the attractive force that the regional territory exercises on Clym pulls him back into his dysfunctional system. The characters in *The Return of the Native* are only apparently autonomous. In truth, they cannot be autonomous because they were never allowed to experience 'dependence from which independence is always generated'.<sup>35</sup> No one can leave the family because its boundaries are too rigid, and if they try to leave, they are eventually punished. In these terms, the region in Hardy as we shall see acquires the symbolism of an almost vindictive, rigid and disengaged system. The characters of Zola and Hardy appear to be individuals entangled in themselves, with their families (mother, father, brothers, partners), and with the regional space. The only children who are rewarded are those who love the region and never dream of abandoning it. Therefore, what is clear is that it is the region, and thereby the family system, that determines or hinders the distancing of its components and their consequent separation and maturity. Finally, in Zola's *La Terre*, the world of La Beauce embodies a type of family, which limits the freedom of its components whose roles are ambiguous and undefined, and whose relationship with each other and the territory appears overall morbidly close-knit and enmeshed.<sup>36</sup> Consequently, in order to maintain their status quo, so the dysfunctional system unaltered, and their territorial possessions

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<sup>33</sup> This is the subject of the section 'A Regional Odyssey in *I promessi sposi*' in Chapter Two.

<sup>34</sup> Found in section 'Rebellious wanderings in *The Return of the Native*' in Chapter Two.

<sup>35</sup> See Minuchin, *Families and Family Therapy*, p. 20.

<sup>36</sup> See Chapter Two, section '*La Terre*: A Regressive Regional Journey' below.

intact, they will not hesitate to commit acts of violence against their own family members, or to push away outsiders. This internal confusion, and the undefined roles produce in the system only slightly permeable boundaries. For this reason, strangers, namely people who do not belong to both the family and region, can never completely be part thereof and are eventually removed or turned away, or they realise they have to stop trying to enter in a nucleus to which they do not belong.

In summary, in the novels I chose to study, regional space can be purposely paralleled to this concept of the family system. Equally to a system, the region also possesses the value of a group of unities (characters and location) in reciprocal interaction. In addition, the region is a socio-cultural system in relation to its history and geography, and not simply as we have already discussed, a static entity. This is also true for the family system made up of unities in relation to one another and to the surrounding territory. Furthermore, the regional space can have physical boundaries, i.e. the one demarcating its perimeter, and more administrative and abstract ones, namely the laws, roles and information established by the various unities forming the region. Equally, the family system has physical boundaries, for example those delimiting the home environment, and administrative ones that we can find in the regulations chosen by the system's members. Additionally, just like in a family, the relations among the unities and the territory in a regional space can allow or obstruct members' processing of individualisation, thus leading to the creation of either a functional or a dysfunctional environment. Consequently, it depends on the type of family (either healthy or pathological), with which the region can be identified, whether the components are able or allowed to undergo personal development and separation. However, it is important to clarify a possible arising problem. When I state that it is the regional space granting or deterring an individual's growth, I do not mean that the region, so a geographical territory, becomes a living entity making decisions about its inhabitants. What I mean, as I shall demonstrate in the next chapters, is that it is the type of relations, rules, communication, and roles the characters in the novel form among themselves and towards the space they occupy that leads to the constitution of a functional or a dysfunctional regional system. Therefore, it is not the region *stricto sensu* but the ensemble of the

system's unities, their relations, and the territory's influence on such relations that permits or obstructs its components' processing of individualisation.

Furthermore, from this introductory panorama on how certain types of relations between family members and between them and the territory lead to the development of functional or dysfunctional systems, another question seems to arise: Can functional regional systems offer their inhabitants the possibility to remain where they grew up? We saw earlier in this chapter the various types of Minuchian families, and how the functional family is the one that allows the individual to carry out the various steps of Jay Haley's family life cycle, among which the most important are, undoubtedly, the separation from the original family system in order to achieve autonomy and the ability to create a new one.<sup>37</sup> At the same time, since we have compared the regional system to the family one, we shall verify whether even in the former system, separation is the element that seals its functionality. In other words, analogously to a family where the separation is manifested through the individual's exit from the original system's boundaries, in the regional system, the individual's functional separation will happen via its exit from the geographical borders. So as we shall see in more details in the next chapter, in the three chosen novels, the characters' lack of separation from the original family, and from the region they inhabit underlines a dysfunctional system, while the ability of the protagonists to separate from both their original family and region, characterises a functional system. Therefore, I shall not use an exclusively psychoanalytic psychodynamic approach, but a systemic-relational one. This methodology offers me the advantage to study how the individuals relate to one another and to their surrounding territory, instead of focusing on the psychological aspect of the single individual, typical of psychoanalysis. In fact, as scholar Paolo

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<sup>37</sup> Jay Haley defines family's life cycle as a series of events and transformations, which produce change in the family's structure, that consequently requires a restructure of the types and quality of the relationships among its members. Jay Haley, *Uncommon Therapy* (New York: Norton, 1993), p. 40.

Gambini states systemic-relational theory allows acknowledging families in their complexity, both as a relational system in continuous exchange with the external environment, and as the primary space in which an individual forms actively his or her own identity, he/she grows and changes.<sup>38</sup> As we shall see, much has been written on the psychological profiles of each protagonist of *I promessi sposi*, *The Return of the Native* and *La Terre*, especially for what concerns Renzo's psychological growth, or the reasons behind Eustacia's atypical femininity, or what causes the violent and vile attitude of Buteau. Little attention, instead, has been given to the relational aspects that develop among characters and between characters and environment in psychodynamic terms, and how these relational intertwinements accompany the protagonists along their process of growth. Consequently, I shall not concentrate on the psychological characterisation of each and every individual in the three novels, risking this way to statically categorise them. In fact, the novels' complexity of relational contexts, and the numerousness and intricacy of the characters in *I promessi sposi*, *The Return of the Native* and *La Terre*, provides me with the opportunity to observe their evolutionary course in a dynamic perspective, understanding also the ability of their systems to re-adapt to changes.

We must underline that my study of functional family and region according to a systemic-relational interpretation, albeit originating from different assumptions, is able to converge and share contact points with the concept of familial and regional functionality from a political and social perspective. In light of sociology and politics, regions are functional when they offer their inhabitants the opportunity to remain where they grew up, to develop, improve their social status and have their social networks. In this respect, as I aim to demonstrate in a moment, the key of analysis I chose for the novels' regions is not in opposition to socio-political theories, but instead it integrates and widens the spectrum of the various possible readings of regional space and of the

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<sup>38</sup> Paolo Gambini, *Psicologia della famiglia: la prospettiva sistemico relazionale* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2007), p. 15.

movements produced by its internal elements. According to political scientists such as Edward Banfield, Robert Putnam and Paul Ginsborg, citizens can live functionally in their region of origin, if they are able to establish, following Putnam, ‘associations, interpersonal communication, solidarity and civic engagement’, which can be achieved by coming in contact with the other outside of one’s original family nucleus.<sup>39</sup> In his study of a small village in a southern Italian region, Banfield generalises that ‘most of the people of the world live and die without ever achieving membership in a community larger than a family or tribe. Lack of such association’, he continues, ‘is a very important limiting factor in the way of economic development in most of the world’.<sup>40</sup> According to the three sociologists, this lack of association to a group bigger than one’s immediate family, belongs primarily to regional spaces whose individuals are ‘afflicted’ by the concept of ‘amoral familism’, and it explains why often rural areas are also characterised by social and economical backwardness.<sup>41</sup> Banfield recognises that amoral familism takes place when a family, due to its degraded life condition and to the poverty of the region it inhabits, is concerned only with its well-being, ‘its material and short-run advantage’.<sup>42</sup> Such a family acts only if it benefits its members, and never its community, as ‘in a society of amoral familists, no one will

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<sup>39</sup> Although the three political scientists primarily focus on the Italian regions, their theoretical framework can be applied to all regions with similar characteristics. Quote is from Robert Putnam, *Making Democracy Work, Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 115. Compare also Edward Banfield, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1958). Paul Ginsborg, *Italy and Its Discontents* (London: Penguin, 2001).

<sup>40</sup> Banfield, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*, p. 7.

<sup>41</sup> Concept of ‘Amoral Familism’ in Banfield, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*, p. 11. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*, p. 172. Ginsborg, *Italy and Its Discontents*, p. 99.

<sup>42</sup> Banfield, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*, p. 115.

further the interest of the group or the community as it is to his private advantage to do so'.<sup>43</sup> According to Banfield, this inability of regional individuals to act together for their common good transcending the immediate interest of a family nucleus, is simultaneously cause and consequence of a region's social and economical backwardness.<sup>44</sup> Relations between different families are difficult and scant, as each unit is afraid the other will become a threat to its own material and short-run advantage, and consequently interactions between different social classes appear impossible. The upper class in order to maintain its status, provides no leadership for the amelioration of the lower class, but instead keeps it in ignorance and poverty by exploiting it; in turn, the lower class regards the upper with profound resentment and hopes for revenge.<sup>45</sup> In such regions, as proposed by Putnam, only 'vertical relations' are present, so those 'linking unequal agents in asymmetric relations of hierarchy and dependence', only benefitting those at the vertex.<sup>46</sup> These unbalanced relations will never benefit the lower-class individuals on the long run, or the group, or the regional economical development as a whole. In fact they produce 'clientelism' and corruption, as families of the lower class in order to perceive more immediate benefits, place themselves in a servile relation to the upper class. This in turn leads to a more rooted amoral familism which renders the region as a civil society closed to the outside, to the other surrounding regions, to the nation to which it belongs and to the external cultural, institutional and political influence.<sup>47</sup> These types of regions are not functional, they are 'uncivic' according to Putnam, as change is impossible, and if the individual wishes to progress economically and socially, he or she is forced to abandon it.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>46</sup> Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*, p. 173.

<sup>47</sup> Ginsborg, *Italy and Its Discontents*, p. 100.

<sup>48</sup> Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*, p. 109.



Instead, according to Putnam, regions are functional and ‘civic’, allowing their inhabitants to remain and to progress, only when individuals are able to develop a network of interpersonal communication and exchange with other individuals belonging to different groups, constituting a community based on ‘horizontal relations’, so on more equalitarian and democratic interactions between classes, with no clientilism, or corruption.<sup>49</sup>

Although, my thesis does not focus primarily on the sociological aspect of the three regions of *I promessi sposi*, *The Return of the Native* and *La Terre*, the concepts analysed above are nonetheless evident. The idea of amoral familism is very much present in Zola’s La Beauce with its inhabitants concerned only about their immediate wealth, their small plot of land, and their distrust of anyone outside their family; the impossibility of communication and horizontal relation between social classes are integral parts of both Egdon Heath and Lombardy, as we shall see in more detail in Chapter Three; the consequent growth of corruption and governmental malfunction, typical factors, according to Ginsborg, of uncivil regions, are found in Manzoni’s Spanish-dominated Lombardy.<sup>50</sup> While, to a different degree, both societies of La Beauce and Egdon Heath remain throughout the novels fixed in their stagnant and primitive economical and social condition, closed within their impermeable borders with no possibility of change, Renzo and Lucia in *I promessi sposi* abandon their uncivic region to find fortune in a civic one, the free Republic of Venice.

Conclusively, from the sociological context of Banfield, Putnam and Ginsborg, dysfunctional regions are those that do not provide an environment for the community’s social and economical amelioration, therefore keeping its citizens in a state of poverty and immobility, secluded from external influences. It is precisely on this point that my systemic analysis meets the sociological one. If as I explained earlier, according to my psychodynamic reading of the novels, functionality of a family system and a regional one is determined primarily by the members/inhabitants’ growth and separation, from a sociological point of view functional regions are those

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>50</sup> Ginsborg, *Italy and Its Discontents*, p. 101.

where citizens are not confined within their family unit, but are able to distance from it, opening towards a new group. Ginsborg in fact claims that ‘a civil society is composed primarily of individuals not of family’.<sup>51</sup> In this way, a necessary movement is produced which leads to a cultural exchange, the establishment of institutions, social mobility and economic improvement.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

## Regional Odysseys

Against this background, my goal is to study how a regional journey, that is a journey made inside the limited space of a region such as Lombardy for Manzoni, Egdon Heath in Hardy and La Beauce in Zola's *La Terre*, influences the psychological and political growth of the novels' protagonists. In these novels, the journey seems both from a purely physical to a more symbolical point of view to be the essential variable towards liberation from the enclosed regional boundaries. The concept of journey is suggestive of being a key element in the protagonists starting their processes of individualisation, development, and final separation from the original family towards the formation of a new one. In the modern novel, especially in the *bildungsroman* genre, the characters often undergo a journey to maturity, or as a sort of catharsis, in order to achieve their goals and expectations. From a more psychodynamic point of view, the journey in relation to the regional space in the chosen novels works as the phases of 'courtship and love' in a family system.<sup>52</sup> These stages are usually regarded as markers of the end of adolescence and the subsequent beginning of adulthood, because they allow the individual to experience the 'other' outside the family. In the same way, the journey in the novels is a cardinal narrative device that permits the characters to acknowledge the new, namely the external system beyond their native one. Reading the region as a space of journeying and adventure will enable me to unlock its complexities and move beyond a simplistic understanding of literary regionalism as both trivial and conservative. Moreover, the trope of the journey will be the tool through which I unravel the concept of region as family in these novels. I will investigate whether as the journey proceeds, the protagonists' psychological and political growth develops, and whether their relationship with the region changes or remains the same, along with the meanings connected to this association. The various outcomes will also

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<sup>52</sup> Jay Haley, *Leaving Home: The Therapy of Disturbed Young People* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980), p. 25.

depend on where the journey takes place, i.e. a functional or dysfunctional system, and on the kind of journey the characters undertake: in Manzoni, the journey is a concrete physical experience as his working-class protagonists cover very long distances on foot and also cross state borders, leaving Spanish-controlled Lombardy to start a new life in the Venetian Republic. With Hardy, the large-scale journey appears almost non-existent but can be found in the protagonists' strolls around the country that is profoundly impregnated with the symbolism I study in the next chapter. In conclusion, the journey appears to be more confined and limited in movements in *La Terre*, as the characters never really leave La Beauce.

I wish to analyse the often-overlooked combination of regional setting with the archetypal adventure pattern of the journey, and the particular way in which what we might call 'regional odysseys' are articulated by Manzoni, Hardy and Zola. At first sight, the association of odyssey with the region might seem puzzling. As seen above, the region is often associated with unchanging immobility and backwardness, while the term 'odyssey' evokes long-distance travels by sea, transformations and adventures, a true quest. So, what happens to the adventure paradigm of the journey when it is transported in the restricted space of the region? In their study of the survival of Romanesque tropes in the modern novel, Clotilde Bertoni and Massimo Fusillo argue that the journey is 'a detachment from the familiar world in order to leap into the unknown and thereby redefine one's identity'.<sup>53</sup> And this is precisely what happens both physically and metaphorically in the regional journeys of the characters portrayed by Manzoni, Hardy and Zola and brings us back to my conceptualisation of the journey as the only real tool to achieve independence from the enclosed regional family system and personal individualisation.

Literature on and of the region has commonly been considered as patronising and simplistic, dealing in flat stereotypes and quaint, picturesque details, a 'minor' genre whose depictions of

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<sup>53</sup> Clotilde Bertoni and Massimo Fusillo, 'Tematica romanzesca o topoi letterari di lunga durata', in *Il Romanzo*, ed. by Franco Moretti (Turin: Einaudi, 2003), pp. 31-55 (p. 40).

characters have no psychological depth or commitment to a complex, problematised representation of reality. As Jim Wayne Miller observes for the American context, ‘regionalism has been considered, correctly and incorrectly, as reactionary; as a simplistic approach to a complex reality’.<sup>54</sup> Few scholars have paid sustained attention to the idea of the regional journey as a vehicle to explore personal and collective identity, which is why I decided to investigate traces and modifications of the trope of the journey in the chosen novels and to observe how the regional setting is central to them. Italo Calvino once argued that the best and truest novels are not the ones describing and focusing on the region and its customs, which he calls ‘la piaga’ (scourge/curse) of all literatures.<sup>55</sup> According to Calvino, the novel has to inhabit the temporal dimension of the plot, and not get caught up in geographical details to the detriment of adventure, which is why Italy has no great novelistic tradition. This project will demonstrate that elements of the plotted time of adventure are not always incompatible with regional space. *I promessi sposi*, *The Return of the Native* and *La Terre* all revolve around an adventurous odyssey, which triggers the whole plot. It might not be a long-distance journey like Odysseus’s, but it is still a transformative experience, albeit only on a regional scale.

From this main body of work, I will then be able to tease out the threads of the other themes I wish to investigate. In contrast to Dainotto’s claim that in the region time seems frozen and ‘history does not rule in its province’, I argue that the region is in fact an entity deeply connected to the historical context in which the novels are set.<sup>56</sup> In Manzoni, Hardy and Zola the region is very much part of contemporary historical developments, or better history pervades the regional space.

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<sup>54</sup> Jim Wayne Miller, ‘Anytime the Ground is Uneven: the Outlook for Regional Studies and What to Look Out For’, in *Geography and Literature: A Meeting of the Disciplines*, ed. by William Mallory and Paul Simpson-Housley (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1987), pp. 1-22 (p. 5).

<sup>55</sup> Italo Calvino, *Mondo scritto e mondo non scritto* (Milan: Mondadori, 2002), p. 12.

<sup>56</sup> Dainotto, *Place in Literature*, p. 17.

As Glen Cavaliero says, it ‘is not simply a static rural society’, and it has the tendency to mirror the social, political and historical situations of the nation as a whole.<sup>57</sup> In *I promessi sposi* figures like Antonio Ferre and Don Gonzalo embodies Spanish rule over Lombardy in the seventeenth century, and via historical analogy, he also represents the foreign domination over Italy in Manzoni’s present time. In *The Return of the Native*, the image of Clym working in Paris represents the movement from region to urban centre taking place in Britain after the second Industrial Revolution. And finally, in *La Terre*, the chapters in the discussion on the construction of the road mirror the deep contrast between regional and urban communities in post-revolutionary France. In these three novels, the region appears to be influenced by the historical changes of the time. It might happen that the regional community does not want to embrace such changes, but the region recognises them, it processes them and then decides whether to welcome them or not. Contemporary events are thus included in the region to the extent that it appears clear that the authors use the regional setting as a narrative device through which they expose and at times criticise not only the regional but also the national social and political problems of the time, shifting the focus from a microcosmic to a macrocosmic reality.<sup>58</sup> As already stated, scholars have rarely explored specifically the bond between modernity and region, and they have at times ignored the possible reasons behind an author choosing a regional setting rather than an urban one; for this reason I aim to study how the portrayal of the region in the chosen novels intervene in questions of nationhood and national identity, such as in the case of Manzoni, and the problem of socio-economic inequality seen in Hardy and Zola.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Cavaliero, *The Rural Tradition in the English Novel*, p. 9.

<sup>58</sup> The social, political and economical analysis of the regional space is found in Chapter Three.

<sup>59</sup> The problem of national language in Manzoni is discussed in section ‘Italy’ below.

### Historical Background and the Development of Regionalism

As we discussed from a sociological perspective, Banfield's amoral familism can be interpreted as a feature that characterises the 'ethos' of a certain region, that is, according to the political scientist, 'the sum of characteristic usages, ideas, standards and codes by which a group is differentiated and individualised in character from another group'.<sup>60</sup> From a literary point of view, as we aim to investigate in a moment, we can parallel the concept of ethos to that of culture, more specifically regional culture, in order to study how regionalist literature came to life. Paraphrasing scholar Wendy Griswold, there is a distinction between the concept of space, which she defines as a void theatre where something may or may not happen, and the idea of place, recognised as a 'centre of meaning constructed by experience'.<sup>61</sup> For Griswold, a place is more of a human accomplishment than a geographical definition, as it appears socially produced and socially productive.<sup>62</sup> In fact, on the one hand, a place must clarify its demarcation and what makes it distinct from any other (socially produced); on the other hand, following Griswold places can influence behaviour, thought and feelings, and, as we claimed earlier in the chapter with Edward Casey, they can orient people (socially productive).<sup>63</sup> Therefore, we can claim that a region is a place rather than a space as it is indeed a centre of meaning constructed by experience, and a system of units in a continuous relation that produce movement. People belonging to a region share a common ground, geographically, politically and socially, that produces common cultural traditions, and also vice versa, so cultural

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<sup>60</sup> Banfield, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*, p. 10.

<sup>61</sup> Wendy Griswold, *Regionalism and the Reading Class* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 6.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>63</sup> See note 62. Casey, *Getting Back Into Place*, p. 23.

commonalities incite political and economic connections.<sup>64</sup> Interestingly, this idea that a region is a place that is simultaneously influenced by and that influences the individuals in its territory, appears coherent, as we shall see in the next chapters, with my conceptualisation of a region as a system whose functionality or dysfunctionality is determined by and also determines the types of relations among its members, and between members and their environment. Griswold defines regional culture as referring to cultural objects ‘arts, crafts, ways of speaking, cooking styles, modes of dress, architecture, that bear a socially recognised relationship to some place’.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, she claims it exists a stronger version of regional culture, defined as regionalism, characterised by deeply rooted people who share a common heritage, and patterns of life, and promote vehemently their cultural expression.<sup>66</sup> As we can imagine place-based culture to survive must have people who know it, produce it and pass it on, which is a process that lays the foundation for the birth of regionalist literature.

Regionalism, both as a literary and political phenomenon, has developed differently in Italy, Britain and France. Critics such as Keith Snell, Peter Brand, David Jordan, Karl Beckson, Arthur Ganz and Phyllis Bentley, to name just a few, usually define regionalist literature as a type of writing concerned with local traditions and customs of certain areas, which are often left in the shadow in more national literary productions.<sup>67</sup> Snell explains that regionalism ‘is a fiction with a

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>67</sup> Keith Snell, *The Regionalist Novel in Britain and Ireland, 1800-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 5. Peter Brand, ‘Regionalismo e realismo nella letteratura italiana moderna’, in *La cultura regionale nella letteratura italiana: atti del VIII congresso A.I.P., università di Exeter 18-20 settembre 1987*, ed. by Luisa Quartermaine (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1989), pp. 3-12 (p. 3). David Jordan, ‘Introduction’, in *Regionalism Reconsidered: New*



strong sense of local geography, topography or landscape', while Karl Beckson and Arthur Ganz define it as 'the representation in a body of literature of a particular locale'.<sup>68</sup> The focus on the local can reach such a level that it makes it 'play a role in the story and influence the lives of the characters'.<sup>69</sup> Supporting this idea, Avrom Fleishmanin had noticed in regionalist novels not only that there is a strong sense of place, but also that the landscape is not satisfied to act in the novel as a background with human subjects in the foreground but 'becomes a real protagonist'.<sup>70</sup> Focusing deeply on the region and on its peculiar customs, traditions and culture, it is clear that regionalist literature aimed at depicting the folkloristic aspect of rural life. According to the British folklorist George Laurence Gomme, 'folklore consists of customs, rites, and beliefs belonging to individuals among the people, to groups of people, to inhabitants of districts or places', and that these customs and traditions are, at times, antagonists of those typical of the city or of the nation.<sup>71</sup> Peter Brand asserts that this specific branch of the literature is the successor to the historical novel and it develops in the second half of the nineteenth century. Eric Storms instead claimed that 'the origins of regionalism were closely connected with the modernisation of the countryside', but as I shall report later in the chapter, they lay not only in the modernisation of the countryside, but also in

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*Approaches to the Field*, ed. by David Jordan (New York: Garland, 1994), pp. IX-XIX (p. XI). Karl Beckson and Arthur Ganz, *Literary Terms: A Dictionary* (New York: Ferrar, Straus and Giroux, 1960), p. 204. Phyllis Bentley, *The English Regional Novel* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1941), p. 14.

<sup>68</sup> Snell, *The Regionalist Novel*, p. 1. Beckson and Ganz, *Literary Terms*, p. 204.

<sup>69</sup> Beckson and Ganz, *Literary Terms*, p. 204.

<sup>70</sup> Avrom Fleishmanin, 'The Buried Giant of Egdon Heath', in *Thomas Hardy's The Return of the Native*, ed. by Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1987), pp. 95-110 (p. 100).

<sup>71</sup> Bob Bushaway, *By Rite: Custom, Ceremony and Community in England 1700-1880* (London: Breviary Stuff, 2011), p. 9.

modernisation as a whole.<sup>72</sup> Overall, one of the most important marks of a typical regional novel is ‘a detailed faithfulness to reality, a conscientious presentation of phenomena as they truly happen in ordinary life on a clearly defined spot of real earth’.<sup>73</sup> The link between regional settings and a realist mode of representation will be crucial to my own analysis of regionalism in Manzoni, Hardy and Zola. In fact, although as we claimed, the chosen novels, with the exception of *The Return of the Native*, are not traditionally known as regionalist, they include the features common to regionalist literature. Griswold claims that although regions are different and thus produce different materials, in regionalist literature there is a typical structure of characteristics common to all.<sup>74</sup> The principal features are: a rural or small village setting (as we shall study in Lombardy, Egdon Heath and La Beauce); a working-class or a number of rustic characters, represented as tough and rooted in their territory (Fouan’s family, the Yeobrights’ family, and to a lesser extent Renzo, Lucia and Agnese); numerous and detailed depiction of the regional territory, flora and fauna (common to all three novels: in the mountain landscapes of *I promessi sposi*, or found in the narrow paths among the archaic heath of *The Return of the Native*, and in the succession of seasons from an agricultural point of view in *La Terre*); a plot moved by conflicts between insiders and outsiders (we shall discuss the distinction between natives and non-natives in the novels in Chapter Two and Three, especially in relation to Jean and La Beauce’s villagers, or to Eustacia and Wildeve against the Egdonites, and to Renzo and Lucia against urban centres or the upper class); finally an often present reference to the past and a simpler way of life (this is evident mainly in Egdon Heath, and in a different way in La Beauce and Lombardy). In this thesis, although the three novels include a number of regionalist themes, we shall investigate whether *I promessi sposi*, *The Return of the*

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<sup>72</sup> Eric Storm, ‘The Birth of Regionalism and the Crisis of Reason: France, Germany, and Spain’, in *Region and State in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Regional Identities and Separatism*, ed. by Joost Augusteijn and Eric Storm (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 36-57 (p. 39).

<sup>73</sup> Keith, *Regions of the Imagination*, p. 45.

<sup>74</sup> Griswold, *Regionalism and the Reading Class*, p. 21.

*Native* and *La Terre* disclose a political and national complexity, given by the novel genre, that goes beyond their regional setting.

We shall now discuss how regionalism developed in Italy, Britain and France to underline any possible differences that we can then find mirrored in the chosen novels. An important note before we proceed. As it will become evident throughout this thesis, when quoting literary and scholarly texts I refer to their original version, the translation is provided solely for the reader and not as part of a linguistic investigation behind a translator's choice. In addition, when I point out in the footnote that the translation is mine, this is due to the lack of official translation for that specific text. When I provide only the English translation of certain passages, this is primarily in relation to secondary references, without including the quote in its original language, is simply to avoid disrupting the discourse with an elevated number of block quotes and indentations. I achieve this by inserting 'paraphrasing' and then the name of the scholar and the paraphrases in English of his or her claims, adding a footnote referring to the text in the original language. Finally, when listing the works of an author, unless I directly quote from them, the footnote will refer only to the text in the original language. In the bibliography, I shall include, when it is possible, both the original and the translation in English of all primary works.

## Italy

Regionalism in Italy developed increasingly during and after Italian unification. Prior to 1861, the country was a deeply fragmented peninsula with a high number of independent regional states – all with their laws and traditions – which found themselves suddenly grouped together under one nation state. This political fragmentation and centuries-long experience of foreign rule in the Italian peninsula had a profound impact on the cultural and linguistic identity of its inhabitants. The historian Enrico Dal Lago reports:

Before 1860s Italians were accustomed to think about themselves as Piedmontese, Lombards, Tuscans, etc., and that their affiliation to different political entities influenced every aspect of their daily life.<sup>75</sup>

Consequently, this Italian disunity was not simply territorial but also profoundly cultural to the point of becoming a matter of personal identity and belonging. In fact, since the eighteenth century, France and Austria had taken control of the Kingdom of Sardinia and the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia in the north while the Bourbons ruled the south of Italy with an iron fist. The presence of foreign authorities in the country was a reality that reverberated in the literature of the time. A number of authors, since before the nineteenth century, such as Boccaccio, Giuseppe Guicciardini, and specifically Petrarch in his *Italia Mia* and Machiavelli in *The Prince* availed themselves of their work to approach the problem of foreign domination.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Enrico Dal Lago, ‘Society, Economy, and Politics in Restoration Italy: Towards a Regional Synthesis’, *The Historical Journal*, 45 (2002), 179-193 (p. 181).

<sup>76</sup> Francesco Petrarca, *Il Canzoniere* (Florence: Andrea Bettini, 1858). Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il Principe* (Turin: Einaudi, 1961).

Foreign rule and the peninsula's divided territory also had a profound impact on the development of a national language, since the different Italian states were characterised by a great variety of spoken and written dialects. These were dramatically diverse from place to place to the point where communication was problematic. One of the first authors to have examined this matter, well before the nineteenth century, was Dante in *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, who claimed that 'in Bologna people who live in the Strada Maggiore spoke differently from those of Borgo San Felice in the outskirts'.<sup>77</sup> Dionisotti writing about Dante reported:

La lezione del *De Vulgari Eloquentia* è in breve questa: un'esigenza unitaria, di una ideale unità linguistica e letteraria, proposta e richiesta a una reale, frazionata varietà, un'unità insomma che supera, ma nel tempo stesso implica questa varietà.

The lesson of *De Vulgari Eloquentia* is in short this: call for unity, for an ideal linguistic and literary unity, proposed to and demanded of an actual, fragmented variety; in short, a unity that overcomes, but at the same time implies this variety.<sup>78</sup>

From this quote we can gain two insights: on the one hand, Dante, as a writer, recognised the need for a literary and spoken common language; on the other, he seems to claim that the Italian population itself recognised this necessity and longed for a national language in which each could find echoes of their own dialects – a common language which at the same time included a variety of dialects.

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<sup>77</sup> Giulio Lepschy, *Mother Tongues and Other Reflections on the Italian Language* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), p. 38.

<sup>78</sup> Carlo Dionisotti, *Geografia e storia della letteratura italiana* (Turin: Einaudi, 1999), p. 35. The translation is my own.

Originally, the ‘questione della lingua’ was simply a literary drawback, and authors strove to find a national language to enlarge their readership, whereas, in the nineteenth century, it became a social problem. The aim, according to the linguist Luca Serianni, was to ‘dotare la comunità dei parlanti di uno strumento funzionale e funzionante’ (‘give to the speaking community a [linguistic] functioning tool’).<sup>79</sup> In this context, the contribution of Manzoni’s *I promessi sposi* can hardly be overestimated. During his long philological work, he realised that he had to abolish the so-called ‘geosynonyms’ (territorial synonyms);<sup>80</sup> it was unthinkable, for Manzoni, that a certain object should be labelled so diversely in every small town. Manzoni’s intention was to juxtapose the spoken language to the written one, finally suppressing the rhetorical ‘fronzoli’ (frillery) that had always been the curse of Italian literature.<sup>81</sup> Manzoni’s groundwork recognised the language to adopt as national in the Florentine of the ‘educated people’.<sup>82</sup> The author’s great innovation, as Migliorini has argued, was to turn what had always been simply a dispute between writers into a social problem concerning the whole Italian population, which he achieved through the use of common people as protagonists of his masterpiece, therefore including the working class as main characters in a novel. Following Migliorini, Manzoni, in editing his novel, delineates his democratic literary programme: to ‘humble’ in themes and language his production in order to be able to speak to all, especially the lower class.<sup>83</sup> As reported by Lanfranco Caretti, already in 1806 Manzoni in a

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<sup>79</sup> Luca Serianni, *Il primo ottocento: dall’età giacobina all’unità* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1989), p. 136.

<sup>80</sup> As defined in Arturo Tosi, *Language and Society in a Changing Italy* (Sydney: Multilingual Matters, 2001), p. 45.

<sup>81</sup> Bruno Migliorini, *Storia della lingua italiana* (Florence: Sansoni, 1962), p. 572.

<sup>82</sup> Serianni, *Il primo ottocento*, p. 136.

<sup>83</sup> Migliorini, *Storia della lingua italiana*, p. 108. See also Alberto Brambilla, ‘Chez don Lisander. Una conversazione manzoniana con Emilio Isgrò’, *Testo*, 74 (2017), 117-129 (p. 126). Note:

letter to his friend Claude Fauriel, manifested his need to overcome the profound separation existing between the written language, the literary and the spoken ones, in support of a civil ideal of a common, popular and national language.<sup>84</sup> Manzoni in fact, paraphrasing historian and critic Natalino Sapegno, rejected the lyricism, which had always characterised the peninsula's literary production both from a linguistic and a content point of view.<sup>85</sup> With *I promessi sposi*, continues Sapegno, we witness Manzoni's refusal of a sterile culture still crystallised in the past, stubbornly closed and deaf to a profound exigency of modernity. Manzoni believed the nineteenth century to be the time to finally latch onto the great awakening movement started in the Lombard Enlightened society, to insert the literary, and political voice of the peninsula into the European context already filled with developmental revolutions.<sup>86</sup> In order to achieve this, we argue, Manzoni decides to use the literary genre of the novel, greatly popular in nineteenth-century European literature, but new in the Italian one, pervaded, up until this point, by a variety of texts in verse, short narratives, tragedies and poetry. The lack of novelistic production in the peninsula was due, as suggested by Vittorio Spinazzola, to, once again, its geographical and political fragmentation; every region felt and looked as a state on its own, not as part of a larger nation, namely because the nation was yet to form.<sup>87</sup> For this reason, people identified with their local place of origin, and some claims Italians

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according to Vittorio Spinazzola, the reader of *I promessi sposi* remained that middle, bourgeois, intellectual class able to appreciate the linguistic effort that Manzoni carried out to compose a language overall popular and realistic. Beyond this frontier, as we can imagine, there was a large populace of illiterates, which Manzoni's writing could not reach. Vittorio Spinazzola, *Il libro per tutti: saggio su I promessi sposi* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1983), p. 50.

<sup>84</sup> Lanfranco Caretti, *Manzoni, ideologia e stile* (Torino: Einaudi, 1974), p. 55.

<sup>85</sup> Natalino Sapegno, *Ritratto di Manzoni* (Bari: Laterza, 1961), p. 8.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>87</sup> Spinazzola, *Il libro per tutti*, p. 57.

still do to this day.<sup>88</sup> More clearly, as we saw earlier in the chapter with Brennan and Moretti, if the novel was the representative form of the nation, we can imagine how in a peninsula with no national unity, this genre had not developed as in other European contexts. Furthermore, as Spinazzola supports, Italian writers could not have had a pragmatic vision of the relationship between the ‘I’ and the ‘others’, of that ‘human integration’ presupposed, according to Caretti, by the novel genre, and also typical of the organizational codes common to national, bourgeois states, constituted by a strong core, and peripheral environments able to understand their distinctiveness.<sup>89</sup> Manzoni, as it will be clear from the analysis of his novel, aimed at providing a story in which everyone, and we can hypothesise also every region, could recognise itself, to include to a certain extent implicitly the discourse around the need for unification; after having come in contact with Walter Scott’s *Ivanhoe*, Manzoni decides to write a historical novel on the Milanese region’s society and people in retrospect, so set in the seventeenth century, as its political, economical and social condition together with the presence of a foreign domination were common to many regional realities and also to many eras of the peninsula.<sup>90</sup> In his choice of the historical novel genre, we can argue, Manzoni demonstrates his longing for realism, both in the background, so in a profound faithfulness to events and traditions of the chosen time and place, and in the characters, as literature for him, who had been influenced by Romanticism, should have had a social, educational and

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<sup>88</sup> Griswold, *Regionalism and the Reading Class*, p. 104.

<sup>89</sup> Spinazzola, *Il libro per tutti*, p. 61. Caretti, *Manzoni*, p. 5.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Ottavio Ghidini, “‘Ho cercato di riprenderlo, di farlo mio’”. Bassani e Manzoni, tra biografia e pagine critiche’, *Testo*, 76 (2018), 113-135 (p. 119). The reasons behind Manzoni’s choice of retrospective writing are also outlined in Chapter Three.



polemic function, and not be pure entertainment, idealisation and evasion from reality.<sup>91</sup> Manzoni believed Scott with *Ivanhoe* had moved too far from the historical truth, while fictional facts should have been perfectly in line with the historical one. As we shall see, Lanfranco Caretti claims that with *I promessi sposi* Manzoni had subtracted from history its scenic frame, but had represented its tragic connection to men's destiny, both humble and powerful.<sup>92</sup> History in *I promessi sposi*, is where the protagonists' lives acquire meaning, and it also allows to acknowledge events from a new perspective, namely that of the humble. For Manzoni history was no longer remembered only through the actions of heroic figures and their grand achievements; instead he faithfully presented historical events through the actions of two humble villagers, Renzo and Lucia, as protagonists of his story. According to Alfredo Sisca, this choice seals Manzoni's shift from his aristocratic and classicistic poetic conception of his earlier tragedies and poems, to a more democratic one paving the way towards a modern literature.<sup>93</sup>

In addition to the search for a national language, the Risorgimento period also saw a growing interest in the local cultures of Italy and an increase in the regionalist literary production. A renewed pride in autochthonous traditions was coupled with a new market of especially northern and urban readers, keen to learn more about their fellow countrymen. Arguably, Manzoni's *I promessi sposi* opened the way for this regionalist trend, which fully developed later in the century. In his novel 'paesaggio e condizione spirituale umana non tendono come altrove all'indistinzione' ('landscape and human spiritual condition are not detached from one another'); nonetheless, they do become strictly connected in a complex relation, which sees the territory as no longer simply a

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<sup>91</sup> Alessandro Manzoni, *I promessi sposi*, ed., by Natalino Sapegno and Gorizio Viti (Florence: Le Monnier, 1971), p. 9. Cf. Angelo Leone de Castris, *L'impegno del Manzoni* (Florence: Sansoni, 1965), p. 235.

<sup>92</sup> Caretti, *Manzoni*, p. 36.

<sup>93</sup> Sisca, *Cultura e letteratura*, p. 114.

background but also as a significant concept in the plot.<sup>94</sup> Manzoni's novel provided a model for realist narratives focusing not on fearless heroes (as in his own earlier historical tragedies), but on humble farmers and labourers, strong Christian beliefs, a strict bond with the native village, and an idyllic view of the home and family.

This line was later followed by writers such as Ippolito Nievo probably one of the first Italian authors who sought a wider readership beyond the educated classes. He believed that being understood by many was better than being understood by a few, but he was also aware of the profound contrast and separation, in nineteenth-century Italy, between intellectuals, who continued to use a formalised version of literary Florentine, and the masses who used regional dialects.<sup>95</sup> In order to achieve this end, he needed to find a language that could be understood even 'dalle donne sotto la cappa del camino nelle lunghe serate d'Ottobre' ('by the women sitting under the hood of their open hearth in those long October nights').<sup>96</sup> Thus, in works such as *Novelliere Campagnuolo e altri racconti*, a collection of short stories written between 1855 and 1856, he employs regional dialects to add realism to the everyday life scenes he depicts, though he uses a more refined language for the philosophical passages, possibly to include in his audience both the upper and the lower class.<sup>97</sup>

The same regional themes can be found in part in the poetical works of Giovanni Pascoli, which concentrate on the world of small things as the only salvation against alienation of modern industrial society deriving from the Italian unification of 1861. The industrial society for Pascoli smothers men; they need to escape and take refuge in the regional world, a safe place where, alone,

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<sup>94</sup> See Ferruccio Ulivi, 'Natura caduca e rappresentazione naturale in Manzoni', in *Conoscere I promessi sposi*, ed. by Gorizio Viti (Florence: Le Monnier, 1994), pp. 245-248 (p. 245).

<sup>95</sup> See Claudio Milanini, *Da Porta a Calvino: saggi e ritratti critici* (Milan: LED, 2014), p. 91.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>97</sup> Ippolito Nievo, *Novelliere Campagnuolo* (Milan: Mondadori, 1994).

they can find consolation and ponder on the evil of the world.<sup>98</sup> This is shown in the poem ‘Orfano’ (Orphan), which I believe is worth reporting here in full.

Lenta la neve fiocca, fiocca, fiocca,  
 Senti: una zana dondola pian piano.  
 Un bimbo piange, il piccolo dito in bocca;  
 Canta una vecchia, il mento su la mano.  
 La vecchia canta: intorno al tuo lettino  
 C'è rose e gigli, tutto un bel giardino.  
 Nel bel giardino il bimbo s'addormenta.  
 La neve fiocca lenta, lenta, lenta.

The snow flakes, flakes, flakes.  
 Listen: a cradle rocks slow slowly.  
 A child cries, little finger in mouth;  
 There sings an old woman, chin on hand.  
 The old woman sings: around your little bed  
 There's roses and lilies, all a sweet garden.  
 In the sweet garden the child falls asleep.  
 The snow flakes slow, slow, slow...<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Calogero Colicchi, *Giovanni Pascoli: introduzione e guida allo studio dell'opera pascoliana* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1973), p. 44.

<sup>99</sup> Giovanni Pascoli, *Myricae*, ed. by Gianfranca Lavezzi (Milan: Rizzoli, 2015), p. 139. Roberta Payne, *A Selection of Modern Italian Poetry* (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004), p. 9.

The poem portrays a crying infant in the cradle while the snow falls softly to the ground. An elderly lady starts singing of a beautiful garden filled with lilies and roses, and in the calmness of this image the baby falls asleep and ‘La neve fiocca lenta, lenta, lenta’ (‘The snow flakes slow, slow, slow’). The regional features of the poem transpire from the depiction of the snow and the garden filled with lilies and roses that can work as metonymy for a small town in northern Italy, where the author himself was born. The woman, too, is a figure linked to the traditional household world. Pascoli’s child in the poem is an orphan, and so for this reason we can assume that a life marked by great loneliness awaits him. Nonetheless, he can find comfort in the world of small things (the *myricae* of the title), so dear to the author. In fact, the elderly lady, maybe a grandmother, who sings a reassuring lullaby, the snow that falls softly to the ground and the garden in bloom all seem to be elements linked to the rural tradition, which is very detached from that of urban centres. It is truly thanks to this idyllic regional frame, that the child can calm down, rest and finally sleep.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the link between the landscape and the individual can be discovered in the early stories of Sardinian writer Grazia Deledda whose early literary production had the small town of Nuoro as its protagonist. In the story ‘La casa paterna’ (‘The father’s house’) she depicts the natural landscape, which she finds so different and yet so similar to how she had left it:

Io avrei voluto che [il treno] andasse lentamente per lasciarmi rivedere palmo per palmo, le mie ubertose campagne, la pianura arsa dal sole, [...] i boschi scossi dalla brezza.

I wished [the train] would move slowly to let me see again the fertile countryside, the sun-dried lowland, and the windy woods.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Grazia Deledda, *Nell’azzurro, fiori di Sardegna* (Cagliari: Davide Zedda, 2006), p. 78.

The opposition between the stillness of rural life and the more rigid rhythms of the urban environment is also clear in the antithesis between tradition and modernity depicted by Deledda when writing about the train. The author calls it a ‘bello e orribile mostro’ (beautiful, and horrific monster). Nuoro, in fact, was ‘a small world enclosed in its own customs and its age-old traditions’, and so the regional population regarded the train as ‘beautiful’, because it was astonishing and extraordinary, but equally always as a ‘monster’, because it symbolised that innovation was trespassing into tradition.<sup>101</sup> The region is overall still depicted as pure and idyllic, ‘a slice of Eden’ unpolluted by modernity and urban industrialisation.<sup>102</sup>

At the same time, if on the one hand a more developed form of mobility was pivotal in intensifying regional appreciation, as Glen Cavaliero claims, on the other hand this led to a decrease ‘in [the] actual observation of living conditions’.<sup>103</sup> In order to avoid regionalism to produce novels about a superficial depiction of a territorial landscape, towards the second half of the nineteenth century, Brand claims that regionalist literature became characterised by a profound sense of realism. Paraphrasing Brand, the writers’ focus on specific regions as protagonists of their novels led them always to produce more realistic depictions of the rural world, which was also a way for the authors to expose the often not idyllic life conditions of regional society.<sup>104</sup> In *Le Paesane* (The Peasants), a collection of short stories set in Sicily and published in 1894, the author Luigi Capuana depicts in each tale a different rural scene, often exposing the poverty of the south of Italy. In the

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<sup>101</sup> Dolores Turchi, ‘Grazia Deledda: The Writer and Her Environment’, in *The Challenge of Modernity Essays on Grazia Deledda*, ed. by Sharon Wood (Leicester: Troubador, 2007), pp. 45-56 (p. 45).

<sup>102</sup> Deledda, *Nell’azzurro*, p. 73.

<sup>103</sup> Cavaliero, *The Rural tradition in the English Novel*, p. 66.

<sup>104</sup> Brand, ‘Regionalismo e realismo’, p. 3.

tale 'La Mula' (The She-Mule), Capuana narrates with profound black humour how the farmer Don Michele is more worried about his mule's health than about his wife's sudden illness:

Siete sempre stata una buona a niente e per ciò la casa è al tracollo! E Cristo, di lassù, vede la mula e non vede voi, non vede.

You have always been useless, this is why the house is in ruin! And Christ, from up there, sees the mule, but he does not see you!<sup>105</sup>

From a macrocosmic point of view, this quote gives a historical and social depiction of the lower class in the south of the peninsula, where the animal is more important than the human being, in this case Don Michele's wife, because it symbolises survival by physically providing nourishment and so life for the family that possesses nothing else. However, perhaps to offer a trace of hope, the mule dies. In this way Capuana seems to maintain intact the importance of the household concept. According to Edoardo Villa, the characters created by Capuana are hard, wrapped around their maniacal convictions and unable to mediate – a life according to 'o la violenza o la rinuncia' ('either violence, or surrender') with no in-between.<sup>106</sup> On the one hand, in Capuana's work we find the typical traits of regionalism, the unheroic protagonists, the importance of the native village and the household. On the other hand, if with Manzoni and Deledda the rural space had to an extent positive connotations, with Capuana and later on with Giovanni Verga, this is no longer the case and the areas described are often limited, narrow and claustrophobic. Undoubtedly, Capuana's tales mirror with extreme realism the rural class of the Mezzogiorno based on farming and husbandry.

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<sup>105</sup> Luigi Capuana, *Le Paesane* (Milan: Marzorati, 1974), p. 146.

<sup>106</sup> Edoardo Villa, *Luigi Capuana: Le Paesane* (Milan: Marzorati, 1974), p. 25.

We saw how Nievo, Pascoli, Deledda and Capuana, although in different literary genres, include in their works regionalist features. However, I have realised how these traits were not as relevant to my thesis' point of view, as those I found in Manzoni's *I promessi sposi*. Nievo, in fact, produces a paternalistic portrait of the rural community in dire need of the upper class' help. With him, (as far as his early novels such as *Novelliere Campagnuolo* are concerned), we still find the old relation between social classes according to a concept of history dominated by great characters. Contrarily to Manzoni, in Nievo the humble characters do not ascend to the role of protagonists but remain 'objects of philanthropic assistance', giving a representation of rural people as flat and devoid of psychological depth.<sup>107</sup> With Pascoli, we cannot talk of a realist region but of an ideal and imaginary space where the author can escape to from the reality that oppresses him. At the same time, Deledda and Capuana focus their works on islands, Sardinia and Sicily, so on territories already geographically detached from the nation, and surrounded by the sea which hampers and slows down any possible exchange. Manzoni, instead, illustrates a space that has the peculiarity of being both a region and a state well involved, as we shall see, in the politics of the peninsula. In addition, the presence of a 'journeying' family in *I promessi sposi* fully meets the themes I shall analyse in the next chapters.

In conclusion, what we can deduce from this historical frame is that regionalism in Italy is closely linked to political and linguistic fragmentation, and responds in multiple and complex ways to the process of national emancipation and unification that began in the late eighteenth century and is arguably still unfinished.

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<sup>107</sup> Caretti, *Manzoni*, p. 16.

## Britain

In Britain, which had been a united kingdom since the beginning of the eighteenth century, the political aspect was less acute, as we saw in the definition of the term region as well, and regionalism was able to develop more specifically as a literary movement. Although for Britain, the nineteenth century was perceived as a time of remarkable change, this appeared to be profoundly different from those witnessed by Italy and, as we shall see, France. First, the problem of language was not as significant for the British nineteenth century history as it was for Italy. In 1780, partly in order to combat the presence of local dialects, Samuel Johnson had published his *Dictionary*, mapping out the British national written language.<sup>108</sup> Not least as a consequence of Johnson's contribution, Britain seemed to have limited controversies in establishing a national written language. Concerning the spoken language, the British population, especially those living in rural areas, still often used regional dialects for communication, as the historian Manfred Görlach reports, 'spoken dialect must have been the normal form of everyday communication in the nineteenth century, with the partial exception of the well-educated, but including some of the middle classes in the South of England'.<sup>109</sup> In fact, as we shall see more specifically in Hardy's *The Return of The Native* the use of dialect is one of the main features, which separates the 'genteel' class from the furze-cutters.

Second, Britain did not live through the alternation of different governmental institutions, unlike France. Nineteenth-century Britain primarily witnessed industrial and economic development and, more importantly, an increase in social problems. Similarly to what we will

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<sup>108</sup> See Liz Bellamy, *Regionalism and Nationalism: Maria Edgeworth, Walter Scott and the Definition of Britishness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 55.

<sup>109</sup> Manfred Görlach, *English in Nineteenth Century England: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 28.



discuss with France, Britain too witnessed a rural exodus, as by 1851 more than half of the population had moved from the countryside to settle in larger towns.<sup>110</sup> The Industrial Revolution saw its factories situated in bigger towns and cities, providing the citizens with a large number of job opportunities. In addition, with this shift from rural areas to the industrial centres, towns and cities started to enlarge, in order to be able to accommodate the growing population. Between 1837 and 1901, the Industrial Revolution foisted upon the British population a number of social problems, such as the overpopulation of towns and cities, as depicted also by the sociologist Friedrich Engels, who reported ‘Every great city has one or more slums, where the working-class is crowded together, [...] removed from the sight of the happier classes’.<sup>111</sup> London slums were crowded with buildings and habitations, which were of course teeming with people. Diseases like tuberculosis were rife, and the use of dirty water often caused outbursts of cholera, typhus and typhoid in many areas of the city.<sup>112</sup> The exposition of unhealthy cities became a central presence in nineteenth-century novels such as *Oliver Twist*, which defines the streets of London:

A dirtier or more wretched place he had never seen. The street was very narrow and muddy, and the air was impregnated with filthy odours. [...] Drunken men and women were positively wallowing in the filth.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Eric Hopkins, *Industrialisation and Society, a Social History 1830-1951* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 4.

<sup>111</sup> Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working-Class in England in 1844* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1892), p. 26.

<sup>112</sup> Hopkins, *Industrialisation and Society*, p. 18.

<sup>113</sup> Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 63.

Also, there were the new workhouses. Hopkins reports '[these] became the last refuge for those who literally had nowhere else to go – the women, the aged, the sick, the very young, and especially the orphans'.<sup>114</sup> These workhouses had the right to sell even the youngest children to factories – a practice that became known as 'pauperism'. Another example of school/workhouse for unwanted children, this time set against a provincial background, is offered in *Jane Eyre*. Jane is sent to Lowood Institution 'It was bitter cold, and I dressed as well as I could for shivering, and washed when there was a basin at liberty, which did not occur soon as there was but one basin to six girls'.<sup>115</sup> Charlotte Brontë criticised the abusive methods used to bring up children in these types of British schools, where pupils were malnourished, not dressed properly for the cold, and were often starved and beaten as punishment for their mistakes.

Part of the Industrial Revolution was undoubtedly the important improvement in the field of transportation.<sup>116</sup> During these years, Britain counted more than 6000 miles of railway crossing the land.<sup>117</sup> In *Dombey and Son*, Dickens describes the railways as an earthquake, something grand and extremely new, which leaves the land in a chaotic state:

The yet unfinished and unopened Railroad was in progress, and, from the very core of all this dire disorder, trailed smoothly away, upon its mighty course of civilisation and improvement.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Hopkins, *Industrialisation and Society*, p. 8.

<sup>115</sup> Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 59.

<sup>116</sup> Hopkins, *Industrialisation and Society*, p. 2.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>118</sup> Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 46.

While the industrial development was happening, the depopulated rural areas, evolved in the fields of industry and manufactures, always maintaining an economy based on agriculture.<sup>119</sup> Therefore according to Phyllis Bentley the reason for the flourishing of regional literature in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Britain was linked to the Industrial Revolution and the subsequent improvement in the transportation sector.<sup>120</sup> In fact, with the arrival of the train, as reported by Bentley, people started to realise they belonged to a certain region, and they were not the same as other people. This led to the increase in regional awareness and consciousness and to the production of regional novels, which, according to Eric Storm served ‘as a means to integrate the inhabitants of the countryside into the greater nation’.<sup>121</sup> People came in contact with other regional realities, discovering their cultures, traditions, and dialects. This was essential in preserving the individuality of these microcosms against the all-equalising nation. In Britain, more than in any other nation, the focus on the historical meaning of the territory becomes the pivotal point of the plot in regionalist novels. According to Snell:

Regional novels concentrate on a particular part, particular region of a nation, it depicts the life of that region in such a way that the reader is conscious of the characteristics which are unique to that region and differentiate it from others in the common motherland.<sup>122</sup>

In the British context, thus, regional literature appears to be a more neutral, less politicised genre than in either Italy or France. The regional novel is usually set within a certain circumscribed area,

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<sup>119</sup> Howard Newby, *Country Life: A Social History of Rural England* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987), p. 77.

<sup>120</sup> Bentley, *The English Regional Novel*, p. 12.

<sup>121</sup> Storm, ‘The Birth of Regionalism’, p. 37.

<sup>122</sup> Snell, *The Regionalist Novel*, p. 2.

which does not include the city, and the characters of the story seldom move outside of it. The city is often seen as something far away, detached, unreachable, even frightening at times; it is ‘a place of noise, worldliness and ambition’ in the eye of rural people.<sup>123</sup>

An author who before the Industrial Revolution had already shown her interest in the provincial is Jane Austen. At the end of the eighteenth century, she depicted the everyday life of the countryside gentry ‘of small, homogenous England’ against the background of ‘the industrialising Great Britain’.<sup>124</sup> However, according to Keith, with Jane Austen we cannot talk specifically of regionalism but of provincial literature. Most of her novels derive their interest in portraying life outside the metropolis, but the urban centre is nonetheless significant in various sections of the novels. Consequently, even if Austen’s novels are usually set in a provincial environment, cities like London or Bath still influence the characters’ life choices and often represent places of longed-for vacations, or of sins where unfaithful loves are born. Although Austen’s characters overall tend to prefer to reside in the calmer and less dangerous countryside, the urban centre is not crossed out from the novels’ general panoramas and the opposition between city and peripheries is not always profound or insurmountable as it usually is in regionalist literature. In addition, Austen’s novels do not focus on the life of the rural, lower class but rather on the countryside gentry and on their comfortable fictionalised everyday life made of balls, gossip and marriages. Keith again commenting on Austen’s provinces notes ‘there is the assumption that local differences are of little consequence’.<sup>125</sup>

Key names in regionalist literature are instead Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot. In Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South* (1855), the story of a young woman forced to leave her native rural village for the industrial town of Milton, the imaginary line that delimits the regional area in

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<sup>123</sup> Williams, *The Country and The City*, p. 1.

<sup>124</sup> Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel 1800-1900* (London: Verso, 1998), p. 14.

<sup>125</sup> Keith, *Regions of the Imagination*, p. 11.

the story works in two ways: as a wall between periphery and city, and as a border between home and the unknown. When asked to describe the village of Helstone Margaret claims ‘Oh only a hamlet; I don’t think I could call it a village at all. There is the Church and a few houses with roses growing all over them. [...] Helstone is like a village in a poem’.<sup>126</sup> In opposition to this perfectly peaceful place, we find the depiction of the town Milton: ‘The air had a faint taste and smell of smoke’.<sup>127</sup> Margaret’s father also states ‘only suppose that your mother’s health or yours should suffer. I wish I had gone into some country place in Wales’.<sup>128</sup> In *North and South* the opposition between rural and urban world is very evident and it shows how for rural people the shift to a more ‘industrialised’ reality is perceived as a shock, as something unnatural, and they long to return to their native land. In the novel there are also examples of prejudice towards urban people. When Margaret finds out that her father took a new job in Milton, she asks ‘What in the world do manufacturers want with the classics, or the accomplishments of a gentleman?’<sup>129</sup> From this quote it seems clear that rural people regarded the urban population as completely immersed in their industrial development. Therefore, a rural, middle-class eye perceived them as uneducated in the fine arts of literature and philosophy. Although Gaskell compared to Austen conveys themes, which more specifically belong to regionalism, she still focuses on the middle/upper class and seems to leave the story of the rural working class untold.

George Eliot’s *Middlemarch, A Study of Provincial Life* (1871), as the title suggests, analyses the provincial reality of the fictional community of Middlemarch together with the rapid increase in industrialisation and class mobility, which from the urban centres was reaching the

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<sup>126</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 8.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

regional areas.<sup>130</sup> In the novel, the author highlights the opposition between rural life and modernity especially when he claims that the new railway would cause the landed proprietors not only measurable but also sentimental damages. He also adds that ‘railways were as exciting a topic as the Reform Bill or the imminent horrors of Cholera’.<sup>131</sup> Albeit being a writer traditionally and rightly defined as regionalist, similarly to Gaskell, Eliot in *Middlemarch* still focuses mainly on the gentry class and introduces the echoes of industrial development within the regional area rather than giving the landscape the cardinal role in the plot, typical features of regionalist literature.

Michael Zeitler claimed that in regionalist literature every place has ‘its own true tale to tell, one that reflects its on-going battle with civilization’.<sup>132</sup> This specific aspect of the region can be found in Thomas Hardy’s *The Return of the Native* and is what renders him in my opinion, as we shall see in the next chapters, a different regionalist compared to the previously analysed ones. Hardy presents a rural life pure and uncontaminated, and proposes a return to a primordial structure of society. About Hardy’s work, D. H. Lawrence claimed that ‘there exists a great background, vital and vivid, which matters more than the people who move upon it’ – and that Hardy truly is a writer who puts the background on the foreground.<sup>133</sup> His Wessex will be the real and alive protagonist of all his novels.

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<sup>130</sup> George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 70.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>132</sup> Michael Zeitler, *Representations of Culture, Thomas Hardy’s Wessex & Victorian Anthropology* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 73.

<sup>133</sup> David Herbert Lawrence, ‘Study of Thomas Hardy: *The Return of the Native*’, in *Thomas Hardy’s The Return of the Native*, ed. by Bloom, pp. 7-12 (p. 12).

## France

Finally, regionalism in France, even more than in Italy, developed after the end of the eighteenth century in the guise of a political party rising up against the increasing centralising power of Paris after the French Revolution, suggesting diverse solutions in order to protect its regional cultural and literary decentralisation. In France, regionalism was defined as ‘the history of the regionalist movement as it developed on the level of ideas, ideology, and political thought’.<sup>134</sup> The regionalist party believed that only an adequate division of power between the city, region and provinces could result in ‘a true creative form of nationalism’.<sup>135</sup> Before the establishment of the First Republic in 1792, the French provinces had enjoyed some degree of administrative autonomy, and had always regarded the capital city Paris as ‘a violent, dangerous and predatory city whose ambition placed provincial rights in jeopardy’.<sup>136</sup> During the Revolution, regionalism had a predominantly reactionary connotation and concerned the provinces’ problems in reacquiring their political independence. Alan Forrest gives a definition of French regionalism, underlining its profound political aspect. He states:

Regionalism was the process, which allowed the various *pays* of France to regain their own organic life. [...] In regionalism lay an essential organizing principle for France, a true and creative form of nationalism.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Ilan Greilsammer, ‘The Ideological Basis of French Regionalism’, *Publius*, 5 (1975), 83-100 (p. 83).

<sup>135</sup> Alan Forrest, *Paris, The Provinces and the French Revolution* (London: Arnold, 2004), p. 227.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>137</sup> See note 135 above.

Provinces, such as Brittany and Provence, traditionally conservative, were seen as strongholds of the *ancien régime*. Timothy Baycroft reports that regions were often allied with the Catholic party or the Monarchists who saw in them a true weapon against revolutionary ideas.<sup>138</sup> Besides ideology, the provinces had other grievances: the Constitution of 1791 made them entirely dependent on the central government in Paris, and the new administrative divisions introduced by the revolutionaries (department, cantons and *arrondissements*) ‘did not correspond to any sociological reality’.<sup>139</sup>

But the tension between provinces and the capital city did not end with the Restoration. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, France was still ‘a predominantly agricultural country’, and it was only towards the 1830s, that the industrialisation process started.<sup>140</sup> Paris became a modernised centre, and the regions, always more deprived of any kind of governmental institution, saw their inhabitants departing to find fortune in the city. As one may imagine, this ‘Exode Rural’ caused an impoverishment of the provinces.<sup>141</sup> Leslie Moch shows that ‘in the forty years following 1851, the population of France grew by only 7

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<sup>138</sup> Timothy Baycroft, ‘National Diversity, Regionalism and Decentralism in France’, in *Region and State in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Regional Identities and Separatism*, ed. by Joost Augusteyn and Eric Storm (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 57-68 (p. 59).

<sup>139</sup> Greilsammer, ‘The Ideological Basis of French Regionalism’, p. 85.

<sup>140</sup> John and Muriel Lough, *An Introduction to Nineteenth Century France* (London: Longman, 1978), p. 26. Albert George, ‘The Romantic Revolution and the Industrial Revolution in France’, in *The Shaping of Modern France*, ed. by James Friguglietti and Emmet Kennedy (London: Macmillan, 1969), pp. 242-247(p. 243).

<sup>141</sup> Anne-Marie Thiesse, *Ils apprenaient la France: l’exaltation des régions dans le discours patriotique* (Paris: Maison des Sciences e l’Homme, 1997), p. 6.



per cent, with the rural population dropping by the 8 per cent while the population in towns of 10,000 and over nearly doubled'.<sup>142</sup> Generally, people from the provinces would go to Paris to earn money in the winter and return home to plough their fields in the summer.

As a result of this relocation to the city, Forrest reports that the idea of *la province* meant no longer 'the province with honourable tradition but in a pejorative sense, a collective term for all the simple, innocent, ill-informed people who had the misfortune to live beyond the *ocroi* gates of the capital'.<sup>143</sup> In Paris, images of the province and their inhabitants were often mocked, and scenes of provincial life, as a place of ignorance, monotony, and conservatism, were inserted in satirical performances. According to Anne-Marie Thiesse 'Le déséquilibre entre une cité hypertrophiée et le reste du pays est extrême. [...] Paris s'identifie par métonymie avec le pouvoir, par métaphore avec la modernité' ('The imbalance between a hypertrophied city and the rest of the country is extreme. [...] Paris is identified by metonymy with power, by metaphor with modernity').<sup>144</sup> In fact, even though smaller villages had started the industrialisation process, for example the greater part of the iron industry was located in the countryside, Paris's centralising power and political influence continued to increase at the expenses of regional areas.<sup>145</sup>

At the beginning of the nineteenth century there was still a profound disillusionment with the Revolution and a tangible fear caused by Napoleon's despotism. Romantic authors,

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<sup>142</sup> Leslie Page Moch, *Paths to the City, Regional Migration in Nineteenth-Century France* (London: Sage, 1983), p. 19.

<sup>143</sup> Forrest, *Paris, The Provinces and the French Revolution*, p. 11.

<sup>144</sup> Anne-Marie Thiesse, *Écrire la France: le mouvement littéraire régionaliste de langue française entre la Belle Époque et la Libération* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1991), p. 59.

<sup>145</sup> John and Muriel Lough, *An Introduction to Nineteenth Century France*, p. 27.

such as Victor Hugo, François-René de Chateaubriand, and, more specifically, Alphonse de Lamartine in *Les Méditations Poétique*, expressed disappointment in the government and disillusionment with ideas of progress. Lamartine, in his *Méditations Poétique* in the poem ‘Le Vallon’, writes:

J’ai trop vu, trop senti, trop aimé dans ma vie;  
 Je viens chercher vivant le calme du Léthé:  
 Beaux lieux, soyez pour moi ces bords où l’on oublie:  
 L’oubli seul désormais est ma félicité

I have seen too much, felt too much, loved too much in my life.  
 I come alive to look for the calm of the river Lethe:  
 Beautiful places, be for me the shores where one forgets.  
 Obliviousness alone is for me happiness.<sup>146</sup>

Similarly to Pascoli, the use of a strong verb such as ‘oublier’ enhances the sufferings of the author, who aims to forget political dissatisfaction while surrounded by nature.

According to Anne-Marie Thiesse, regional novels in France are usually set in the present time or in a recent past. Traditional and folkloristic festivities such as ‘Saint-Jean, moissons, vendages, veillées, tuée du cochon, Noël’ (‘Saint John, the harvests, vigils, the killing of the pig, Christmas’) usually marked the passing of time.<sup>147</sup> An almost constant feature is the continuous conflict between periphery and centre, village and capital city,

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<sup>146</sup> Alphonse de Lamartine, *Méditations Poétique* (Paris: Rignoux, 1830), p. 51. The translation is my own.

<sup>147</sup> Thiesse, *Écrire la France*, p. 187.

tradition and modernity. In parallel with the Italian regional novels, the protagonists are no longer heroic figures but ordinary citizens of the rural areas. A key name in French regionalist literature is George Sand who, inspired by her positive childhood memories of the countryside, wrote pastoral novels. In the 1846 novella *La Mare au diable*, for instance, life in the village is illustrated as being peaceful and humble. Sand adopts a sentimental point of view, emphasising the virtue, solidarity and benevolence that in her view characterise rural life. At the beginning of the novel Sand portrays the difference between city and countryside from an almost political point of view: ‘l’homme de loisir vient, chercher un peu d’air et de santé dans le séjour de la campagne, puis il retourne dépenser dans les grandes villes le fruit du travail de ses vassaux’ (‘The man of leisure comes to the country for his health or for a change of air, but goes back to town to spend the fruit of his vassal’s labour’).<sup>148</sup> The antinomy urban environment versus rural establishment is immediately evident. On the one hand, the city man is called a ‘man of pleasure’, a person whose life appears to be profoundly uncomplicated, idle and fatigueless. On the other hand, the rural dimension is enhanced by the term ‘vassaux’ (‘vassal’), which brings to mind an idea of dependence, of subordination, of someone who has to work for someone else that enjoys the resulting fruits – an image, in short, which evokes a medieval representation of the rural world.

Despite this feudal social reality, the rural characters are represented positively because they are virtuous, in that they can face moments of hardship but still remain humble. Through her depiction of rural scenes, Sand shows her readers a life less polluted by greed and avarice, in which people are cordial and generous to one another, underlining the affective dimension that unites the peasantry. This is found in the statement of Germanin’s father-in-law:

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<sup>148</sup> George Sand, *La Mare au diable* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1995), p. 30. George Sand, *The Devil’s Pool*, trans. by Jane and Ellery Sedgwick (London: Dent, 1895), p. 16.

Quand je t'ai pris pour gendre, quoique ma fille fût riche et toi pauvre, je ne lui ai pas fait reproche de t'avoir choisi. Je te voyais bon travailleur et je savais bien que la meilleure richesse pour des gens de campagne comme nous, c'est une paire de bras et un coeur comme les tiens.

When I took you for my son-in-law, although my daughter was rich and you were poor, I never reproached her for choosing you. I saw that you were a hard worker, and I knew very well that the best fortune for people in such a country as ours is a pair of arms and a heart like yours.<sup>149</sup>

With these words Sand seems to detach herself from the political dimension she introduces in Chapter Two, in favour of a more sentimental point of view. The region seems to be a sort of idyllic place where, as long as you are benevolent and hard-working, it does not (always) matter whether you are rich or poor.

With the rise of realism towards the first half of the nineteenth century, depictions of rural and provincial life were introduced in literature to depict the social and historical situations of the time. The focused use of prose as a tool for social and political critique produced in the nineteenth century 'the creation of the basis of the modern novel'.<sup>150</sup> These novels exposed the corruption of government and the life conditions of French people, and they also highlighted the discrepancies between rural and metropolitan life. These characteristics are rooted deeply in Balzac's *Les Paysans* (1844) and in *Le Médecin de campagne* (1833), two novels that reveal the negative results of Napoleonic policies and later

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p. 44. Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>150</sup> George, 'The Romantic Revolution and the Industrial Revolution', p. 246.

of capitalist economy.<sup>151</sup> In *Les Paysans*, Balzac describes the growth of capitalism and the consequent destruction of the French aristocracy by the hand of the peasants.<sup>152</sup> These, reduced to poachers, and described as ‘vipères’ (‘vipers’), in the house of Fourchon, the leader of the ‘rural army’, secretly plot to overthrow the large aristocratic landownership, in order to divide it among themselves, ‘s’entretenait donc, vivace et venimeuse, chaude et agissante, la haine du prolétaire et du paysan contre le maître et le riche’ (‘so it was that the hatred of the proletariat and the peasant for the wealthy and the master was kept at a white heat, active and venomous’).<sup>153</sup> In *Le Médecin de campagne*, Balzac depicts a utopian world expressing the social functions of the aristocratic landowners. When in the novel doctor Benassis, tells the officer Genestas that he wishes to help the villagers affected by cretinism, we can detect how Balzac is presenting a paternalistic realm where the aristocracy guides and elevates the rural class in a conservative regime with only an apparently progressive view.

In both Sand and Balzac, however, the depiction of the rural space and its community does not appear realist as it is profoundly influenced either by their childhood memories – in the former – or by their political ideas – in the latter. Sand’s novels tend to idealise the region to the point where the real, harsh life conditions of the rural class are almost forgotten, while Balzac creates a utopian and paternalistic environment to give support to his political defence of the aristocratic landownership.

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<sup>151</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Les Paysans* (Paris: Alexandre Houssiaux, 1855). Honoré de Balzac, *Le Médecin de campagne* (Lausanne: Rencontre, 1968).

<sup>152</sup> Arthur Kahn, *Balzac: A Nineteenth Century Novelist with Lessons for America* (Bloomington: Xlibris Corporation, 2010), p. 16.

<sup>153</sup> Balzac, *Les Paysans*, p. 98. Honoré de Balzac, *The Peasants*, trans. by George Ives (Philadelphia: Barrie, 1899), p. 76.

The author I chose to study instead, as he portrays with an objective eye the rural class and the deep bond between regional settings and men is the Naturalist Émile Zola. Paraphrasing Pierluigi Pellini, Naturalism produced texts recording everyday-life events, and the authors did not dare judge their characters' actions.<sup>154</sup> Furthermore, Professor Riikka Rossi claims that, unlike Sand, in his novels Zola 'proposed an aesthetics of disinterested observation and objective truth, which resists romantic sentimentality and avoids an author's own emotional intervention in the narrative'.<sup>155</sup> It is specifically due to his characteristic of Naturalist anthropologist that as we shall see Zola is able to depict the region as it is in the nineteenth century, and not as it was constructed by his own political ideas.<sup>156</sup> Henri Mitterand states that 'le trait dominant de naturalisme de Zola est l'idée de vérité' ('The dominant trait of Zola's naturalism is the idea of the truth').<sup>157</sup> The novel I chose to analyse in this work, *La Terre*, similarly to *Germinal* with its miners' revolts, reports how the

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<sup>154</sup> Pierluigi Pellini, *Naturalismo e verismo, Zola, Verga e la poetica del romanzo* (Milano: Mondadori, 2010), p. 59.

<sup>155</sup> Riikka Rossi, 'Writing Disgust, Writing Realities: The Complexity of Negative Emotions in Émile Zola's *Nana*', in *Writing Emotions*, ed. by Ingeborg Jandl, Susanne Knaller, Sabine Schönfellner and Gudrun Tockner (Wetzlar: Majuskel Medienproduktion GmbH, 2017), pp. 277-293 (p. 277).

<sup>156</sup> See Christian Mbarga, 'Émile Zola: Just a Well-Known Figure of the Naturalist Movement or an Overlooked Historian?', in *Re-Reading Zola and Worldwide Naturalism: Miscellanies in Honour of Anna Gural-Migdal*, ed. by Carolyn Snipes-Hoyt, Marie-Sophie Armstrong and Riikka Rossi (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), pp. 97-113 (p. 101).

<sup>157</sup> Henri Mitterand, *Zola et le Naturalisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1986), p. 25.

Revolution had moved from Paris to the peripheries, and that if in the city they had witnessed an industrial and economical improvement, things were awry in the countryside, with people becoming less and less human.<sup>158</sup> Interestingly, my psychodynamic key of interpretation for the three novels in this thesis, appears coherent to Zola's Naturalism, specifically with the scientific rigor and scrupulous historical, sociological and linguistic exploration that allows the author to present objectively the plots of his family saga of *Rougon-Macquart*, to which *La Terre* belongs. According to Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and Sally Ledger, in his collection of twenty novels interlacing the plots of two family branches the Rougons and the Macquarts, Zola examined methodically how heredity and social reality determine the collective and individual's actions; Zola scrutinised systematically the social, sexual and moral landscape in everyday-life events through a scientific-Darwinian angle in order to study the evolution of men in his historical context and to depict it in his novels.<sup>159</sup> Doing so, Zola proves how social context and lineage can determine a certain type of behaviour in an individual. My systemic-relational methodology goes beyond this assumption, and shall underline how human behaviours and the functionality of a group of individuals are the results of the relations that they establish among themselves and between themselves and the territory they occupy.

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<sup>158</sup> Émile Zola, *Germinal* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1979).

<sup>159</sup> Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, 'La strada', in *Il Romanzo*, ed. by Franco Moretti (Turin: Einaudi, 2003), pp. 465-493 (p. 489). Sally Ledger, 'Naturalism: Dirt and horror pure and simple', in *A Concise Companion to Realism*, ed. by Matthew Beaumont (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 86-101 (p. 88). For Zola's records of life events consult Émile Zola, *Carnets d'enquêtes une ethnographie inédite de la France*, ed. by Henri Mitterand (Paris: Plon, 1986).

In conclusion, if regionalism in Italian, British and French novels, on the one hand, tends to depict the idyllic folklore of a circumscribed area, on the other hand, regionalist novels are also permeated with a secondary motive. Overall, in the three European nations, regionalist literature was often a device through which authors compared and contrasted city and rural life, criticising the government's faults, or those of the capital city, in relation to the peripheries. Let us now zoom in on the chosen novels in order to study how Lombardy, La Beauce and Egdon Heath function as a family system and within their national contexts.



## **Chapter Two: Minunchian Families and the Journey in the Regional Space**

This chapter will consider issues around family structure and interactions in the regional spaces defined by *I promessi sposi*, *The Return of the Native* and *La Terre*. On a microcosmic level, through the use of the systemic theories, I will study the different kinds of family *stricto sensu* we find at the centre of each of the three novels. On a macrocosmic level, I will interpret the regional space in which the plots are set through the prism of the family system theory developed by pioneer psychotherapist Salvador Minuchin in the 1960s and 1970s. This will enable me to uncover what links exist between various family systems and the regional environment they inhabit and whether the region itself as a collective space can be said to function in ways analogous to actual families, or even compete with them in establishing roles, boundaries and patterns of behaviour.

Salvador Minuchin views a family as ‘a special kind of system with structure, patterns, and properties that organise stability and change’.<sup>160</sup> For this reason, a functional family system is able to ensure the progressive growth, and therefore change, of its members in terms of their own independence and individualisation. According to Minuchin, as we briefly discussed in the previous chapter, this can be achieved only if:

The structure of the family is that of an open sociocultural system in transformation. Second, if the family undergoes development, moving through a number of stages that require restructuring. Third, if the family adapts to changed circumstances so as to maintain continuity and enhance the psychosocial growth of his members.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Patricia and Salvador Minuchin and Jorge Colapinto, *Working with Families of the Poor* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1998), p. 15.

<sup>161</sup> Minuchin, *Families and Family Therapy*, p. 51.

Using Minuchin's insight as a starting point, this chapter will examine whether the family systems represented in the novels appear functional – that is, if they follow Minuchin's patterns and allow for individual independence – or dysfunctional, by hindering the process of individualisation and growth. Minuchin identifies two extremes in the spectrum of family dysfunctions. On the one hand, dysfunctional families can appear 'enmeshed', whereby communication between members is exaggerated, the boundaries among them are too flexible and permeable and the members' hierarchical roles are almost non-existent. Minuchin states 'in the enmeshed system, there is no distance between family members', and so 'they are discouraged [from] autonomous exploration and mastery of problems'.<sup>162</sup> On the other hand, a dysfunctional system can be 'disengaged'. According to Minuchin, in this case we find rigid boundaries that do not allow emotional exchange either inside between members, or towards the outside of the system. He, in fact, argues that 'members of disengaged systems may function autonomously but have a skewed sense of independence and lack feelings of loyalty and belonging'.<sup>163</sup> In the disengaged system there appears to be no expressive connection between one another, as each member cares only about its own interests and not about the other, who is often, as we shall see in Zola, regarded as a possible threat. Both kinds of boundary problems (the enmeshed and the disengaged system) offer to family members only an apparent form of independence, when in truth they are all relegated and subjected to it.

In connection to the crucial issue of change and transformation, I shall consider how movement in space represents the fundamental key to achieving independence. This is a concept that I will investigate in the chosen novels to observe whether the characters undergo a physical or an allegorical journey inside the region in which the stories are set, a significant

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>163</sup> See note 161 above.

movement or displacement, in other words, a true ‘regional odyssey’. The outcome of the journey can be assessed based on whether characters succeed in distancing from one’s original family system, and achieve autonomy by establishing a new one, whatever its form. In conclusion, I will compare novels that include concrete journeys, like in the case of Manzoni’s *I promessi sposi*, but also novels such as Zola’s *La Terre* and Hardy’s *The Return of the Native*, both of which lack an obvious travel motif, in order to detect the different resulting formations of family systems. As far as the structure of my thesis is concerned, it appeared difficult and confusing to divide it in chapters approaching my arguments through a simultaneous analysis of the three novels. Although *I promessi sposi*, *The Return of the Native* and *La Terre* share as we saw previously a number of similarities such as a family protagonist and a pivotal territory, their story lines are different and complex. For this reason, I believe that approaching in every chapter the three novels separately, one for each subsection, and producing a comparison at the end of the chapter and at the beginning of a new one, allowed me to have the breadth I needed to carry out a thorough analysis of functional and dysfunctional family systems without losing focus on my arguments. In addition, the three novels will not be analysed in their chronological order but in accordance to the typology put forward by Minunchian theories. I will look firstly to Zola and Hardy and secondly to Manzoni tracing a passage from the more dysfunctional models of *La Terre* and *The Return of the Native* to the functional aspects found in *I promessi sposi*.

La Terre: A Regressive Regional Journey

Concerning Zola's *La Terre*, scholars such as Pierluigi Pellini, Luca della Bianca, Brian Nelson, Claude Seassou, Winston Hewitt and György Lukács have focused primarily on the social and naturalistic aspects of Zola's work, not considering the region as an active force in the narrative.<sup>164</sup> In addition, what I found is that most scholars have concentrated on Zola's *Rougon-Macquart* cycle in general, studying the conditions of the French lower classes in the city, without giving too much attention to the French rural environment or to the concept of region as an embodiment of family, which is the aim of this study. Before starting our investigation, we must contextualise *La Terre*'s position within Zola's saga. The *Rougon-Macquart* is a series of twenty novels written between 1871 and 1893, delineating the story of two branches of a dysfunctional family. Everything begins with the orphan of a rich family of market-gardeners Adélaïde Fouque who, in the first novel of the cycle, *La Fortune des Rougon*, is depicted as tainted by a mental disorder:

Cette enfant, dont le père mourut fou, (...) en grandissant, devint plus bizarre encore ;  
elle commit certaines actions que les plus fortes têtes du faubourg ne purent

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<sup>164</sup> Pellini, *Naturalismo e verismo*, p. 57. Luca della Bianca, *Introduzione alla grandezza di Emile Zola* (Pesaro: Metauro, 2008), p. 57. Brian Nelson, 'Zola and the Nineteenth Century', in *The Cambridge Companion to Émile Zola*, ed. by Brian Nelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 1-18 (p. 7). Claude Seassau, *Emile Zola le réalisme symbolique* (Paris: José Corti, 1989), p. 77. Winston Hewitt, *Through those Living Pillars: Man and Nature in the Works of Émile Zola* (Paris: Mouton, 1974), p. 36. György Lukács, *Studies in European Realism: A Sociological Survey of Writings of Balzac, Stendhal, Zola, Tolstoy, Gorki and Others* (London: The Merlin Press, 1972), p. 85.

raisonnablement expliquer, et, dès lors, le bruit courut qu'elle avait le cerceau fêlé comme son père.

This girl, whose father had died insane (...) as she grew up, she became still stranger; she did certain things which were inexplicable even to the cleverest folk of the Faubourg, and from that time it was rumoured that she was cracked like her father.<sup>165</sup>

Since, as we explained, Zola's aim was to investigate the influence lineage and social context have on the formation of the individual, in the twenty novels is clear how all the members belonging to Adélaïde's offspring disclose either psychological, physical or social disorders.<sup>166</sup> Adélaïde in *La Fortune des Rougon*, marries the coarse gardener Rougon with whom she has a son Pierre, initiator of the Rougon legitimate line of succession. Upon her husband's death Adélaïde takes a lover, the drunkard Macquart and she has two children, Antoine and Ursule, representative of the Macquart illegitimate branch of the family. Both lines deriving from Adélaïde are tainted: the Rougons inherits Adélaïde and her husband's obsession with money, social status and power, as it is clear in the characters of Pierre Rougon and his children Eugène, Aristide and Sidonie, as well as a profound love for excesses as we can deduce from the character of Pascal and his attitude towards the young Clotilde; most of the Rougons, in fact, belong to the wealthier class.<sup>167</sup> The Macquarts,

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<sup>165</sup> Émile Zola, *La Fortune des Rougon* (Paris: Pocket, 1991), p. 65. Émile Zola, *The Fortune of the Rougons*, trans. by Brian Nelson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 39.

<sup>166</sup> Philippe Bonnefis, *L'Innommable essai sur l'œuvre d'Émile Zola* (Paris: Sedes, 1984), p. 26.

<sup>167</sup> For what concerns social status and power we can find this in the character of Pierre and Eugène Rougon, respectively in Zola, *La Fortune des Rougon*, and Émile Zola, *Son*

instead, seem to inherit Adélaïde's psychological and social distress, as they grow up to be idle and exploiting (Antoine Macquart in *La Fortune des Rougon*), or to be social outcasts such as prostitutes (Nana, daughter of Gervaise Macquart in *Nana*), drunkards (Gervaise Macquart in *L'Assommoir*), and murderers (Jacques Lantier in *La Bête Humaine*).<sup>168</sup> The novel I chose to investigate, *La Terre* is the fifteenth of the *Rougon-Macquart* and depicts the regional vicissitudes of Jean Macquart, third son of Antoine Macquart, and nephew of Adélaïde; Jean, however, as we shall study later on in this chapter, contrarily to his sisters Lisa and Gervaise and most of the Macquarts, appears to be the only member of the original family to undergo a functional evolution.

Zola's novel *La Terre* centres around the Fouan family, namely the tough, hard-working peasants Old Fouan and Rose Fouan and their three children: Hyacinthe, the eldest, nicknamed 'Jesus Christ', a drunken former soldier; Fanny, who is the smart yet controlling daughter; and Buteau, the selfish and murderous youngest son. The novel opens in the midst of a profound family reorganisation and as the story progresses, interactions among the Fouans display features of both enmeshed and disengaged systems. Old Fouan has in fact decided to divide up his land among his three children, with the promise that they will pay him a monthly pension in return. We can recognise here, as Hannah Thompson suggests, a 'patriarchal model' of the family system with a clear structure and hierarchical roles; the

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*Excellence Eugène Rougon* (Paris: Pocket, 1995). The Rougons' obsession with money is clear in protagonists such as Aristide and Sidonie found in Émile Zola, *L'Argent* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1974) and Zola, *La Curée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981). The love for excesses and luxuries is found in Émile Zola, *Le Docteur Pascal* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1975).

<sup>168</sup> Émile Zola, *Nana* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1968). Émile Zola, *L'Assommoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978). Émile Zola, *La Bête Humaine* (Paris: Babel, 1992).

father is the head of the family with his possessions and land and the children are placed at a level of dependence.<sup>169</sup> From the very title, Zola makes clear that the land is the source of Fouan's power and the foremost concern of all involved. Relations between parents and children and between siblings are governed by their attitude to and ownership of the land, which also determines their role in the system. When Fouan explains his reasons for wanting to divide his properties, his sole preoccupation is for the land:

C'était la tristesse infinie, la rancune sourde, le déchirement de tout son corps, à se séparer de ces biens si chaudement convoités [...] cultivés plus tard avec un acharnement de rut, augmentés ensuite lopins à lopins, au prix de la plus sordide avarice. [...] Ni épouse, ni enfants, ni personne, rien d'humain : la terre!

His immense grief, hidden resentment and appalling heartache at giving up this land which he himself had so greedily cultivated, with a passion that can only be described as lust [...] No love for wife or children, nothing human: just the land!<sup>170</sup>

In French, *la terre* has both the ordinary meaning of cultivated ground or soil and the absolute, existential sense of 'the Earth'. These two meanings are found in Fouan's attachment to the land which is both material, as from its harvest depends his survival; and existential, physical, passionate, almost sensual and far outweighs any emotional connection

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<sup>169</sup> Hannah Thompson, 'Questions of Sexuality and Gender', in *The Cambridge Companion to Émile Zola*, ed. by Nelson, pp. 53-66 (p. 54).

<sup>170</sup> Zola, *La Terre*, p. 38. Zola, *Earth*, p. 18. All further references to these editions are given after quotations in the text.

with the other human members of his household.<sup>171</sup> Chantal Pierre-Gnassounou has even advanced the hypothesis that the name Fouan is connected to ‘the verbs *fouir*, to dig, and *enfouir*, to bury’, which clearly underlines an affinity *ab origine* between the man and the territory and expresses his closely connected relationship with the earth and his role as a worker of the land.<sup>172</sup>

The quote above leads us to recognise in the Fouan family a profoundly dysfunctional system. In Minuchinan theory, a functional family system presents three working subsystems: a spousal subsystem, a parental subsystem and a sibling subsystem.<sup>173</sup> Zola’s highly sexualised language (‘déchirement’, ‘chaudement’, ‘rut’) highlights the erotic charge of Fouan’s attachment to the land – his loyalty and devotion are directed solely to this archetypal female and he has little regard for his wife Rose, who is described as always afraid of her dictatorial husband and ‘réduite dans le ménage à un rôle de bête docile et laborieuse’ (p. 35; ‘reduced in the family to the level of a submissive, hard-working beast of burden’, p. 16). Neither has the parental subsystem provided nurture or guidance to the younger generation. Old Fouan is a cruel and violent patriarch, and Rose ‘les avait élevés tous les trois, sans tendresse, dans une froideur de ménagère qui reproche aux petits de trop manger sur ce qu’elle épargne’ (p. 40; ‘had shown no tenderness to any of the three in their upbringing [...] blaming them for consuming so much of what herself was trying so hard to save’, p. 20). This passage confirms the lack of interest and the emotional distance within the family, which are

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<sup>171</sup> Concept of ‘land more important than people’ found in William Berg and Laurey Martin, *Émile Zola Revisited* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), p. 125.

<sup>172</sup> Chantal Pierre-Gnassounou, ‘Zola and the Art of Fiction’, in *Cambridge Companion to Émile Zola*, ed. by Nelson, pp. 86-104 (p. 98).

<sup>173</sup> Janice and Mikal Rasheed and James Marley, *Family Therapy Models and Techniques* (London: Sage, 2011), p. 216.



typical features of a disengaged system.

As a result, the family system appears to be damaged. This is underlined in the episode where the family gathers in the lawyer's office. Each sibling is there as a separate individual, not as a member of a family but as competitors, as they all seem to focus on securing their own advantage. Fanny tells her husband, 'Tu sais, laisse-moi faire [...] J'aime bien papa et maman, mais je ne veux pas qu'ils nous volent ; et méfions-nous de Buteau et de cette canaille d'Hyacinthe' (p. 34; 'Don't forget, leave everything to me [...] I'm very fond of Mother and Father but I won't let them rob us, and we must look out for Buteau and that good-for-nothing Hyacinthe', p. 15). This quote also enhances the idea that Fouan's disengaged family system did not allow for the formation of a 'sibling subsystem'.<sup>174</sup>

If the lack of emotional communication in the family suggests a disengaged system, Fouan's attachment to the land resembles an enmeshed relation in that he describes his love for the earth, as the lust of a man for a woman: 'il avait aimé la terre en femme qui tue et pour qui on assassine' (p. 38; 'he loved his land like a woman who might kill you and for whom a man will commit murder', p. 18).<sup>175</sup> The roles in this singular couple appear blurred and the boundaries between its elements almost indistinct as they evoke those between two lovers. In fact in enmeshed systems Minuchin claims the individual to be 'handicapped in that the heightened sense of belonging requires a major yielding of autonomy'.<sup>176</sup> Old Fouan's desire to acquire more land leads him to extremes of self-abnegation, which he also imposes on his wife and children:

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid., p. 217.

<sup>175</sup> See Martine Cremers, 'Fraçoise dans *La Terre*: Le sacrifice d'une victime désignée ou le triomphe de la divinité païenne', in *L'Écriture du féminin chez Zola et dans la fiction naturaliste*, ed. by Anna Gural-Migdal (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003), pp. 345-256 (p. 345).

<sup>176</sup> Minuchin, *Families and Family Therapy*, p. 55.

Telle parcelle représentait des mois de pain et de fromage, des hivers sans feu, des étés de travaux brûlants, sans autre soutien que quelques gorgées d'eau (p. 38).

Each single piece of land represented months of a bread-and-cheese existence, spending whole winters without a fire and summers of endless toil in the scorching heat, with no respite beyond a few mouthfuls of water (p. 18).

This intense longing for the land renders him dependent, almost subjugated to it; moreover, his whole identity and relationships appear to be determined by his possession of the land, which seems to become, throughout the story, the medium for the formation of a bond between family members in an otherwise extremely disengaged system. For this reason, Fouan, by dividing up his possessions, ends up severing the only connection that formally defines his family.

Consequently, the change of ownership from Fouan to his children activates major changes in the structure and roles of the family system and determines the beginning of his journey. He will actually experience a restless wandering from Fanny's house to Buteau's, then from Buteau's home to Jesus Christ's, to return one final time to his youngest son. Fouan's movement is restricted to the triangle formed by the three homes and will be interrupted only by his own death. However, his journey does not represent an occasion for change and development but a regressive process. Through his itinerary, moving from place to place, Zola charts Fouan's ever-increasing vulnerability and dependence on others. Old and cut off from the land he has given away, he seeks a home that welcomes him and someone who will nurture him. He undergoes a sort of *anabasis*, a metaphorical journey to hell that ends in a complete loss of authority, independence and also identity. As Hans Ulrich

Gumbrecht has claimed, Zola's characters are entirely determined by the surrounding environment, here the Beauce region, which inevitably leads to a clear loss of subjectivity.<sup>177</sup>

Minuchin asserts that the lines of responsibility and authority are undermined not only by excessive rigidity, but also by a form of control that appears erratic rather than flexible. As he states, 'messages that are unclear and contradictory confuse the children and interfere with their understanding of acceptable behaviour'.<sup>178</sup> Fouan's offspring perceive the division of his property as a sort of abdication. Minuchin claims that 'parenting always requires the use of authority. Parents cannot carry out their executive functions unless they have the power to do so'.<sup>179</sup> In effect, when the siblings are assigned a portion of Fouan's fields, he, the father, loses the possession on which his authority was founded and is placed on an inferior level of dependence. He also suffers a reduction in his social status within La Beauce's community, as before 'il fut [...] salué et considéré, lorsqu'on le sut rentier et propriétaire' (p. 319; 'people greeted him and held him in esteem because he was known to be man of substance, with land and private means', p. 279). Arguably, the story of *La Terre* is only superficially that of family and its own internal psychological dynamics. The real protagonist and propelling force of the plot is the earth itself, both at the macro level, as the ancient, hidden substrate that is mythological and archetypal, and at the micro level, as the land whose ownership is in discussion.<sup>180</sup> It is this multi-layered complex notion of 'the earth', embodied in the concrete, historical space of the region, which shapes the relationships between the characters and influences their choices. As Chantal Bertrand Jennings maintains 'c'est la terre le vrai vainqueur des lutes intestines entre les Fouan' ('it is the land that is the true victor in the

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<sup>177</sup> Gumbrecht, 'La strada', p. 490.

<sup>178</sup> Minuchin, Minuchin and Colapinto, *Working with Families of the Poor*, p. 15.

<sup>179</sup> Minuchin, *Families and Family Therapy*, p. 58.

<sup>180</sup> Cf. Berg and Martin, *Émile Zola Revisited*, p. 123.

intestine struggles among the Fouans').<sup>181</sup> Furthermore, the earth seems to operate as a tyrannical woman/mother figure who gives life but demands total submission.

After dividing his land and selling his house, Fouan's journey begins, as he moves in with his daughter Fanny at the suggestion of her husband Delhomme. In his usual cautious and upright manner, he declares:

Vous savez, père, je ne dis rien, parce que vous croyez peut-être que j'ai intérêt à vous prendre [...] Fichtre, non! Ce sera un rude dérangement [...] Seulement ça me fâche, de voir que vous vous arrangez si mal, quand vous pourriez être si à l'aise (p. 216).

You know, Father, I'm not saying anything because you may be thinking I hope to get something out of taking you in. Damn it, no, it'll be quite an upheaval. But, can't you see, it bothers me to see you in such a poor state when you could be so comfortable (p. 181).

Delhomme makes it clear that his father-in-law is a burden to his newly established family system, which includes only himself, his wife and their son Ernest, known as Nénesse. The Delhommes are reasonably well-off, so it is not money that worries Fanny's husband but perhaps (although this is never spelled out) the potential conflicts arising from Fouan's presence in the family home. The insertion of an individual that should be – on the basis of age and kinship – an authority figure, in a system that already includes authority figures,

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<sup>181</sup> Chantal Bertrand Jennings, 'Le Troisième règne: Zola et la révolution copernicienne en littérature', *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 3 (1980), 396-410 (p. 401). The translation is mine.

would threaten its structure. Even though Fouan ‘ne manquât de rien chez sa fille’ (p. 279; ‘lacked for nothing at his daughter’s’, p. 241), he did not feel at home, because it is Fanny who now represents the head of the family system, as she is the one who possesses the land. The author tells us ‘elle qui, autrefois, lors du partage, était certainement la meilleure, s’aigrissait, en arrivait à une véritable persécution’ (p. 280; ‘whereas at the time the property was divided, she had certainly been the nicest of the children, now she was turning sour and really beginning to persecute him’, p. 242). In this case too, the earth, just like a real family member would do, enters the father-daughter relationship and defines who carries authority.

In the managing of his small farm Delhomme demonstrates astute husbandry, but at home he is much influenced by his wife Fanny, who is obsessed with cleanliness and order. Their relationship is functional in its own way, as the couple has been able to establish reciprocal accommodation and responsibility. Delhomme in fact ‘n’aurait pu trouver une ménagère plus intelligente ni plus active, au point qu’il se laissait conduire en toutes choses’ (p. 33; ‘could never have found a more capable or hard-working housekeeper; indeed he was so satisfied that he followed her lead in everything’, p. 15). Undoubtedly, Fanny is for Delhomme an invaluable helpmate, but there is a controlling, overbearing aspect to her character which reveals itself most fully in her treatment of her father with her constant reminders ‘Père, vous savez bien que je ne veux pas ça’ (p. 281; ‘Father, you know very well that I don’t allow that’, p. 243), which manage to humiliate Fouan and reduce him to tears.

For what concerns their parental subsystem, in contrast to the older Fouans, Fanny and Delhomme’s one appears to be moving towards the more enmeshed side of the spectrum. Traces of this tendency can be detected in the attitude of extreme protection the parents activate in two instances, in order to keep Nénesse unaltered and fixed in his role of defenceless child. The first is when the Delhommes pay one thousand francs to Monsieur Baillehache’s lottery to avoid their son being drafted for war, consequently keeping him

shielded from the outer world. Fanny declares ‘Je ne veux pas que Nénese parte’ (p. 83; ‘I don’t intend to let Nénese go’, p. 59). This phrase appears in deep contrast to the general interventionist mood and social pressure on young men to enlist shared by the region’s members, especially by the church’s bellringer and gamekeeper Bécu, who is proud to send his son to war. He claims ‘La guerre, ah! C’est ça qui fait les homes!’ and, making an aggressive use of gender stereotype, he reproaches Fanny, ‘vous voulez donc que Nénese reste une fille? Ce que je vais vous coller Delphin au régiment, moi!’ (p. 84; ‘War? War makes a man of you, by God! [...] Do you want Nénese to be a cissy? I’m going to make damn sure that Delphin goes into the army’, p. 60). A second example of enmeshment is to be discovered in Fanny and Delhomme’s excessive intrusion into their son’s choices, as they initially oppose Nénese’s idea to leave the family’s land and go work in a restaurant with a dance band in the provincial town of Chartres. Zola reports ‘longtemps, les parents s’étaient opposés à cette désertion de la culture’ (p. 282; ‘for a long time, his parents had been opposed to this desertion of farming’, p. 244). However, such meddling seems to be mitigated as the Delhommes represent the most functional family in the novel. Thanks to the accommodating reciprocity of the parental subsystem, they finally allow Nénese to separate and leave for Chartres, ‘mais enfin la mère, flattée, avait décidé le père’ (p. 282; ‘but his mother had at last been prevailed upon to persuade his father’, p. 244). Conclusively, Nénese is able to separate from his original microcosm and from the land for which ‘il avait toujours eu l’horreur’ (p. 282; ‘he had always had a horror’, p. 243). In fact, although Chartres is part of La Beauce, the town represents a different space and a separate system from the regional one.

Consequently, when Fouan enters this enmeshed system, he ends up playing the role of the intruder in a close-knit family. Fanny starts persecuting him by constantly chasing him, ‘toujours derrière le bonhomme, essuyant, balayant, le bousculant pour ce qu’il faisait et pour ce qu’il ne faisait pas’ (p. 281; ‘always after him with a cloth or a dustpan and brush,

attacking him for what he did and what he did not do', p. 242). Instead of doting on her father, treating him with tenderness or at least fearful devotion, as Rose Fouan had done, Fanny disrupts gender roles and uses her newly-found authority to abuse and torment the former head of the family. Unlike him, she is not physically violent, but she does constantly pinprick him with meanness.<sup>182</sup> In her interactions with her father, Fanny perpetuates the disengaged attitude that dominated in her family of origin. Fanny's obsession with cleaning and order marks and enhances her cold and unloving attitude towards her father. In fact, she often responds to Fouan with statements such as:

Vous pouvez boire la maison et en crever, si ça vous amuse... Ce que je ne veux pas, c'est que vous salissiez ma table, avec vos verres qui dégoulinent et qui font des ronds, comme au cabaret (p. 281).

You can drink the house and die of it, if it makes you happy. What I don't want is you dirtying my table, with your glasses dripping and making circles, as if this was a tavern (p. 243).

Fanny's cruel words demonstrate her indifference and lack of emotional exchange with her father. Interestingly, this disengaged feature is activated only towards him, as a kind of relic of their original family system.

Fanny and Delhomme's attitudes towards the land are probably what we could identify as the most functional aspect of Fouan's family. Their regard for the land they inherited is not as lustful as Fouan's and it does not hinder the affection the family members have for one another. Still, there are traces of Fouan's unbalanced priorities. For instance,

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<sup>182</sup> Zola, *Earth*, p. 242.

when Fanny's uncle dies, she walks away from the wake to check on her crops, hit by a hailstorm: 'Ah ! Quel travail !' she sobs, 'ça en faisait, du ravage, dans les légumes et dans les arbres à fruits ! Les blés, les avoines, les seigles n'étaient pas assez hauts, pour avoir beaucoup souffert' (p. 121; 'Oh, what a business! What a dreadful damage to the vegetables and fruit trees! The wheat and oats and barley weren't tall enough to have suffered much', p. 93). Usually rather curt and strict, Fanny's language here is full of pathos, but her laments are not for the departed uncle; she cries instead for the damage inflicted to the produce, described as almost sentient beings who can 'suffer'. Once again, this quotation enhances the idea that in *La Terre*, the land is more important than any human being and its preservation vital. The regional system seems to act as a macrocosmic family that does not tend to its children's evolutionary needs, but prevents their process of separation and individualisation, leaving them in a constant state of total dependence. However, contrarily to what happens in the other systems of *La Terre*, the region in the case of the Delhommes, allows a separation and an acquisition of independence on a more microcosmic level. In addition, not only are Fanny and her husband able to withdraw from their original family in order to create their new one, but they also allow their son to depart and, to some extent, individualise.

Old Fouan's descent towards what seems his progressive and complete loss of authority and autonomy continues at Buteau's house. Having accepted Buteau's offer to go live with him, Fouan finds himself in a new, dysfunctional family system, based in a certain sense on profitability. Having made his cousin Lise pregnant, Buteau initially refuses to marry her, and only when her father dies, leaving her his home and land, does he make up his mind and leads her to the altar. The narrator claims:

Tandis que, visiblement, dans ses yeux gris, passait l'idée de la bonne affaire, ce troisième lot devenu avantageux, cette ancienne à épouser, dont le champ, à côté du



sien, avait presque doublé de valeur (p. 178).

In [Buteau's] grey eyes, visibly, there flashed the idea of getting a bargain now that his third was worth having and this old girl worth marrying, now that her field, which was next to his, had almost doubled in value (p. 146).

The use of the terms 'bonne affaire', 'avantageux' and 'valeur' presents the marriage from the start as a contractual agreement, not made out of love, but out of greed for more valuable land. Once again, even in Buteau and Lise's family system the land is the only bond that keeps people together, in the complete absence of mutual feelings. Their family shows strong traits of disengagement, and yet, according to Martine Cremers, as we shall see, the land is also the catalyst for the exchange of one emotion: anger.<sup>183</sup>

In contrast, Buteau has an enmeshed relationship with the land, with no degree of separation. Just like Fouan, he regards the earth with the eyes of a lover:

Lorsque les pièces ne demandaient plus de travail, il y retournait pour les voir, en amoureux. [...] Sans sortir de sa maison, il la désirait sous ses yeux (p. 196).

Even when there was no more work to do in his fields he would go back and gaze at them like a lover. [...] Without leaving the house he devoured [the earth] lovingly with his eyes (p. 162).

Like his father, Buteau desires the land with overpowering lust and is completely in thrall to

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<sup>183</sup> Cremers, 'Fraçoise dans *La Terre*', p. 345.

it, and as we shall see, he will stop at nothing to keep it for his own.<sup>184</sup> As Sandy Petrey has argued, in *La Terre*, the earth's 'effects on those unfortunate enough to live under its dominion are monstrous', and in this regard Buteau and Lise's relation to the earth appears deeply enmeshed, as the members are highly dependent on it.<sup>185</sup> Furthermore, there is no trace of what Minuchin defines as a sense of separation between members and the earth but only a profound sense of belonging. This is due to the fact that these family members have never taken part in extra-familiar activities, namely events outside the family nucleus, through which separation is achieved as Minuchin specifies.<sup>186</sup> Both Buteau and Lise come from farming families whose lives revolved around the land. As for most inhabitants of La Beauce, this continues from one generation to the next and we can witness what psychologist Maria Malagoli Togliatti calls the 'incomplete passage', which takes place when the individual's passage to the next step of his life is only apparent, because in reality there is no change in terms of interpersonal relations or in the ways in which the family system works.<sup>187</sup> As husband and wife, Lise and Buteau show little of the complementarity and reciprocal accommodation that exist between Fanny and Delhomme, since they consistently address one another in an abrupt and violent manner. This is clear in the way Buteau talks to Lise when he finds out she is pregnant again: 'Foutu ventre! Plus bête qu'une oie! la ruine de la maison!'

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<sup>184</sup> The concept of Buteau's 'sexually-laden desire for "Mother Earth"' is found in Riikka Rossi, 'Trangression, Nostalgia, Order: Representation of the Primitive in Émile Zola's *La Terre* and Knut Hamsun's *Markens Grøde*', *Nordlit*, 28 (2011), 257-270 (p. 261).

<sup>185</sup> Sandy Petrey, 'Zola and the Representation of Society', in *Cambridge Companion to Émile Zola*, ed. by Nelson, pp. 39-52 (p. 41). The concept of 'earth as a dominator' also found in Berg and Martin, *Émile Zola Revisited*, p. 123.

<sup>186</sup> Minuchin, *Families and Family Therapy*, p. 48.

<sup>187</sup> Togliatti, *La psicologia della famiglia*, p. 4.

(p. 232; ‘Damn belly! You’re more stupid than a goose! You’re the ruin of the house!’, p. 196). Buteau’s only care in the world is his land and just as Old Fouan has claimed at the beginning of the novel, for the son reigns as well the phrase ‘ni épouse, ni enfants, ni personne, rien d’humain: la terre!’ (p. 38; ‘no love for wife or children, nothing human: just the land!’, p. 18). Lise and Buteau’s children are rarely mentioned, being wholly overshadowed by the land and already resembling their parents: ‘le regardait avec les yeux durs de la famille’ (p. 399; ‘they had the pitiless eyes of their mother and father’, p. 351).

Nothing is sacred in *La Terre*, and in his mad desire to hold on to the land, Buteau even contemplates bigamy. Terrified at the prospect of having to give Lise’s sister Françoise her share of the property once she becomes of age or marries, he reasons:

Pourquoi n’aurait-il pas épousé les deux sœurs, si elles y consentaient? Un vrai moyen de resserrer l’amitié et d’éviter ce partage des biens, dont il s’épouvantait, comme si on l’avait menacé de lui couper un membre! (p. 287).

Why shouldn’t he marry both the sisters if they agreed? That would be a proper way to cement their friendship and avoid dividing their property, which he dreaded, as though someone was threatening to cut off one of his limbs (p. 248).

Buteau’s thoughts seem to evoke a primitive social organisation that exists ‘beyond all civilised values’.<sup>188</sup> In addition, Buteau’s blatantly hypocritical reference to ‘amitié’ is belied by the treatment reserved for Françoise. Fully complicit with her husband, Lise does nothing to protect her sister from his assaults: ‘Salope! couche avec, à la fin! [...] J’en ai assez, je file, moi! si tu t’obstines, pour me faire battre!’ (p. 289; ‘Bitch! Sleep with him, bugger it! I’ve

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<sup>188</sup> Brian Nelson, ‘Introduction’, in *Earth*, trans. by Nelson and Rose, pp. 7-20 (p. 12).

had enough, I'm off if you're going to keep it up and get me knocked around into the bargain!', p. 250).<sup>189</sup> However, Françoise knows how to defend herself with well-placed kicks 'in a tender part', and in rebelling against Buteau's authority she continues to emasculate him metaphorically.<sup>190</sup> The lustful Buteau, eager to play the role of the patriarch, seems unable to establish his power over the women of his family, as his wife is constantly pregnant – against his plans – and Françoise refuses to give in to his advances. The only person he is able to boss around is Fouan.

Fouan's arrival leads to a reconfiguration of relationship patterns between husband and wife. Minuchin explains that 'coalitions involve people who are drawn together by an opposition to another family member' and Lise and Buteau are accordingly drawn together by their hostility to Fouan.<sup>191</sup> While at the Delhommes' he lacked for nothing, Fouan is allowed very little 'douceurs' ('luxuries') at the Buteaus': 'il était guetté, dévalisé, tous les trimestres, quand il revenait de toucher à Cloyes la rente' (p. 294; 'he was watched, raided, every quarter, when he came home from collecting the money in Cloyes', p. 254). Taking away his money, Lise and Buteau also take away Fouan's autonomy and independence, which is shown most clearly in a scene at the beginning of Part Four where Fouan catches his son once again trying to force himself on Françoise and notices Lise watching disinterested. Fouan in this case is unable to remain silent and instead intervenes. This escalates to a heated argument between father and son 'sang contre sang, dans ce heurt de la brutale autorité que le père avait léguée au fils' (p. 298; 'blood against blood, in this clash of brutal authority that the father had bequeathed to the son', p. 259). Once more, Zola underlines the resemblance between Fouan and Buteau in that both of them want power over others, and Fouan indeed claims it by

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<sup>189</sup> Rasheed, Rasheed and Marley, *Family Therapy Models and Techniques*, p. 217.

<sup>190</sup> Zola, *La Terre*, p. 235. Zola, *Earth*, p. 200.

<sup>191</sup> Minuchin, Minuchin and Colapinto, *Working with Families of the Poor*, p. 16.

stating 'Je suis le maître, le père' (p. 298; 'I am the master, I'm your father', p. 259) – aiming to re-establish not only the authoritarian figure of the father, but also a sort of structure, which the Buteau's family system, in its moral corruption, completely lacks. However, Fouan has forsaken the means of establishing superiority over his son, that is, his land, and so Buteau can brazenly answer: 'Allons donc, vieux farceur, vous n'êtes rien du tout' (p. 299; 'Oh, for God's sake, you silly old man. You are nothing at all', p. 259).

This exchange contrasts sharply with Buteau's attitude towards his father at the beginning of the novel. Here, Fouan was able to strike a hard bargain with his children and secure for himself a sizeable allowance: 'Je n'ai pas un sou, pas un liard de placé. Vous avez trop coûté pour ça, mauvaise bougres !' (p. 45; 'I've not got one penny invested, not a single farthing! I had to spend too much on you, you miserable lot!', p. 24'). On the previous occasion Buteau remained silent and backed down, scared of his father's 'réveil de son autorité' (p. 45; 'reawakening of his authority', p. 24). Now we witness a change in roles, because Buteau is now the owner of the land and Fouan must in a way recede, as he has become a parasite in his son's home. Fouan realises 'c'était fini, il ne comptait plus, depuis qu'il s'était dépouillé' (p. 299; 'this was the end, he no longer counted since he'd stripped himself of his assets', p. 259). At this point of Fouan's journey, he has completely lost his authority, but his decline is not yet complete.

The morning following this argument, Fouan resumes his ineluctable journey towards Jesus Christ's house. Hyacinthe's family system appears as pathological as those of his siblings. Fanny defines Jesus Christ as a 'canaille' (p. 34; 'good-for-nothing', p. 15) underlining once more the lack of emotions and care between members of the original family system. Jesus Christ resides in a sort of cellar he calls 'Château' (p. 301; 'Castle', p. 261) and, unlike his parents and siblings, has no apparent interest in the land:

La terre, en voilà une blague ! [...] elle est à moi, elle est à toi, elle n'est à personne. [...] Tu es son esclave, elle te prend ton plaisir, tes forces, ta vie, et elle ne te fait seulement pas riche ! [...] Moi, tu vois, je suis rentier, je m'arrose ! [...] ah ! Bougre de jean-jean ! (p. 226).

The land makes me sick. [...] it's mine, it's yours, it's nobody's. [...] You're a slave to it, you bloody fool. It takes away all your pleasures, all your strength, your whole life [...] it doesn't even make you rich! [...] While I, I live like a prince, as you can see, I just drink (p. 191).

On his return from military service in Africa, in fact, he had refused to 'battre les champs, refusant tout travail régulier, vivant de braconnage et de maraude, comme s'il eût rançonné encore un peuple tremblant de Bédouins' (p. 34; 'settle down or take a regular job and now made his living by poaching and pilfering as though still looting poor defenceless Arabs', p. 15). Jesus Christ is the only one of the Fouans to have ever left La Beauce, and yet he has gained nothing from his experiences outside the region. His return to La Beauce is also probably what triggers his drinking habit, which we could interpret as a form of self-therapy, helping him to heal from the failed attempt to become an independent individual. Unlike his siblings, he does not value the land for itself but makes a purely instrumental use of it to fund his addiction, selling his share bit by bit to Buteau and Delhomme to earn the five francs to buy alcohol.<sup>192</sup> He exists in a kind of vicious symbiotic relationship with his brother and sister, who of course do nothing to help him give up his habit, as it is in their best interest that he keeps on drinking and selling off his land. He is a spendthrift while the others are fanatically thrifty and takes a self-destructive pleasure in squandering what they regard as the

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<sup>192</sup> Zola, *La Terre*, p. 310. Zola, *Earth*, p. 269.

most prized possession.

Eventually, Jesus Christ goes as far as selling off the last field he owns to someone outside the family and this is the last straw for Old Fouan. If, at the beginning, the cohabitation with his son had gone smoothly, after this event Fouan is heartbroken: ‘T’es un assassin’ he tells his son, ‘c’est comme si tu prenais un couteau, vois-tu, et que tu m’enlèves un morceau de viande [...] Un champ si bon, qu’il n’y en a pas de meilleur!’ (p. 310; ‘You are a murderer, it’s like taking a knife and cutting a piece of flesh out of my body. Such a good field, you couldn’t find a better one!’, p. 270). Similarly to what we witnessed with his daughter Fanny, Fouan describes the field as an animate being, even as a part of himself, something that constitutes his very self and identity. Jesus Christ replies ‘Mon Dieu, on a le temps d’être mort et de l’avoir à soi, la terre!’ (p. 311; ‘God, once you’re dead you’ll get all the land you want’, p. 270). These words remind us of the spirituality and of the sacredness of an important moment in Christian tradition: the burial of the deceased. It appears interesting how it is Jesus Christ who speaks the phrase. He is a figure who we often find in the novel in a sort of perverse ascetic status trying to distance himself from the world by the use of alcohol. Jesus Christ’s asceticism is heightened if we think that it is expressed by a character outside of the social order, who chooses to take on the role of God. By retorting against his father ‘once you’re dead you’ll get all the land you want’, Jesus Christ seems to mimic God in the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden. His words echo *Genesis* 3, 19: ‘till thou return unto the ground; for out of it was thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return’.

Jesus Christ has a daughter, known as La Trouille, with whom he establishes a coalition, as in the case of Buteau and Lise, against Fouan. The roles are blurred, though, because the daughter becomes in effect a housewife, as her father exploits her for the household chores, and also as a partner in crime, because she is taught to steal to survive.

Fouan sees la Trouille coming back with ‘une poule, pêchée à la ligne, de l’autre côté d’un mur’ (p. 304; ‘a hen she had hooked from over a wall’, p. 264). Once the coalition is formed, Fouan starts living the same humiliation he has already undergone at the Buteaus’. The two poachers begin, like Buteau and Lise, to search for the famous ‘magot’, the last remaining bonds he has concealed, thereby making Fouan terrified: ‘Jésus-Christ l’envoyait, cette garce, à cause de sa légèreté, de sa souplesse, pied nus, se coulant partout’ (p. 373; ‘Jesus Christ sent [his daughter] because she was so light, so supple, barefoot, slithering around everywhere’, p. 329). The fear of being robbed makes Fouan decide to go back to Buteau asking with submissiveness ‘Y a-t-il un coin pour moi, ici? Je viens coucher’ (p. 373; ‘Have you got a corner for me? I’d like to spend the night’, p. 329). Determined to keep his autonomy intact, Fouan is taken in by Buteau who rejoices as ‘c’était de l’argent qui revenait’ (p. 374; ‘it meant more money coming in’, p. 329). The last and final phase of Fouan’s journey will be at Buteau’s, where he will lose in addition to his authority, his autonomy, his identity and also his life.

Buteau has lost part of his land and home due to Françoise’s marriage to Jean Macquart, a stranger to La Beauce, a corporal from the town Plassans in Provence, who was stationed in Italy and fought at the battle of Solferino. His reaction resembles Père Fouan’s despair at the sale of the family’s land. According to Martine Cremers, Buteau perceives Françoise’s marriage to the foreign Corporal as a betrayal to the family, and expressing his desperation, he goes around screaming to the whole village ‘Je vas me neyer! Je vas me neyer!’ (p. 371; ‘Mind out! I am going to drown myself!’, p. 326).<sup>193</sup> Any sexual rivalry he might feel for Françoise’s new husband is displaced onto the land, once again described in feminine, eroticised terms:

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<sup>193</sup> Cremers, ‘Françoise dans *La Terre*’, p. 347.



Puis, maintenant, c'était la terre que l'autre lui retirait des bras pour la posséder, elle aussi. Autant lui couper un membre. [...] une terre qu'il regardait comme sienne, qu'il s'était juré de ne jamais rendre ! (p. 363).

And now his land was being torn from his arms for the other man to own. It was like having a limb cut off. [...] the land which he regarded as his own and had sworn never to give up (p. 319).

As the selfish and rapacious character he is, Buteau immediately starts planning a way to get the land back. As if by magic, all the Fouans who up until this moment have been fighting each other, immediately form an alliance against the stranger who is endangering the status quo of their dysfunctional system. If emotions, as we saw, cannot cross over the inappropriately rigid boundaries of this disengaged system, Macquart represents the cause of a 'high level of individual stress' that Minuchin claims to be the only key that 'reverberates strongly enough to activate the family's supportive system'.<sup>194</sup> The land is once again the fundamental requisite for the activation of the family's supportive systems in order to maintain intact its internal homeostasis.

Buteau and Lise find out that Françoise, who is pregnant, has not signed an official paper leaving her house and land to her husband. Consequently, they realise that if they want to take back their possessions, they must kill her, 'si la gueuse s'était tuée avec son enfant, le mari n'avait rien, la terre et la maison leur faisaient retour' (p. 413; 'supposing the little bitch had been killed and her brat with her, then her husband would have been left with nothing and the land and the house would have come back to them', p. 365). Françoise and Jean have created a family system based on the sharing of the land and the home. In fact, their spousal

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<sup>194</sup> Minuchin, *Families and Family Therapy*, p. 55.

and parental subsystems appear erratic and pathological. First of all, the couple has not established a reciprocal complementarity and accommodation as Jean loves Françoise but she feels no real affection for him, largely because he remains a stranger to her eyes: ‘s’il l’aimait toujours, lui, il avait bien deviné qu’elle ne l’aimait pas, qu’elle ne l’aimerait jamais, comme il aurait désiré l’être, à pleins bras, à pleine bouche’ (p. 406; ‘even if he still loved her, he had realised that she did not, and never would love him in the way he would have liked to be loved, body and soul’, p. 358).

As Luca della Bianca argues, Jean seems to be the only positive character in a novel whose fundamental assumption is that the possession of land leads to unimaginably brutal acts.<sup>195</sup> Regarding, instead, this lack of feelings on Françoise’s side, Douglas Parmée has observed that:

Jean has one distinguishing moral quality: unlike almost all the others, he is shown as capable of tenderness, in his relation to his wife Françoise; as Jean is very much the outsider in this village community, is there not a suggestion here that tenderness is a luxury that peasants cannot afford?<sup>196</sup>

Parmée’s use of the terms ‘village community’ seems to emphasise Jean’s role of outsider, not only at the microcosmic level of family system, but also at the macrocosmic level of the regional network. Françoise’s failure to sign the official paper is another example of a sort of disloyalty towards her partner, which renders her indirectly complicit to Buteau’s plans, as deep down she too hates the idea that the land should become the property of an outsider.

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<sup>195</sup> della Bianca, *Introduzione alla grandezza di Émile Zola*, p. 99.

<sup>196</sup> Douglas Parmée, ‘Introduction’, in *La Terre*, trans. by Douglas Parmée (London: Penguin, 1980), pp. 5-19 (p. 6).

Françoise is at the centre of a dispute between Jean and Buteau as both use her to obtain the land, creating to an extent what Jay Haley defines as a ‘perverse triangle’. In Haley’s triangulation ‘the child is stuck in a loyalty conflict and becomes the focus of each parent’s attention, because they maintain a conflict between themselves by excluding each other’.<sup>197</sup> We can easily apply this concept to the triangle formed by Jean, Françoise and Buteau. In fact, following Haley’s structure, Jean and Buteau allegorically represent the parents, and Françoise the daughter, who is stuck in a loyalty conflict wavering between her blood relations and her husband. She is therefore more inclined to leave her possessions to Buteau, in a way similar to Haley’s child who tends to side with the parent he or she needs the most, or believes that it must be supported. Françoise is aware that her own sister and husband mistreated her reducing her ‘au rôle de servante’ (p. 290; ‘to the role of skivvy in the house’, p. 251), and she should leave her land and house to Jean. However, she cannot bring herself to ‘betray’ her family, favouring an outsider, in the same way as Jesus Christ:

Un homme d’un autre pays, poussé ailleurs, on ne savait où, un homme qui ne pensait pas comme ceux de Rognes, qui lui paraissait bâti différemment, sans lien possible avec elle (p. 406).

A man from another world, born and bred somewhere else [...] a man who did not think like people of Rognes, who seemed to be a different sort of person from her and with no possible connection with her (p. 358).

The situation escalates to an act of shocking violence. Buteau rapes Françoise and Lise kills

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<sup>197</sup> Alison Taylor, *The Handbook of Family Dispute Resolution, Mediation Theory and Practise* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), p. 43.

her off with a scythe ‘la faux lui entrait dans le flanc’ (p. 418; ‘slicing into her flesh’, p. 370). In her death’s throes, the young woman still refuses to confess knowledge of the culprits to her husband: ‘J’étais venue à l’herbe [...] je suis tombée sur ma faux [...] Ah! C’est fini!’ (p. 419; ‘I’d come for some grass. I fell on my scythe. Oh, it’s the end of me!’, p. 370). What is more, as she is dying Jean asks her to sign the paper – and she flatly refuses:

La terre, la maison n’étaient pas à cet homme, qui venait de traverser son existence par hasard, comme un passant. Elle ne lui devait rien, l’enfant partait avec elle. À quel titre le bien serai-il sorti de la famille? (p. 424).

The land and the house did not belong to this man who came into her life by chance, like someone passing in the night. She owed him nothing, their baby was going away with her. [...] By what right would the property leave the family? (p. 375).

Placing family and land before her own life, Françoise consciously allies with Buteau and Lise against her husband, the outsider, giving strength to the rigid boundaries of her disengaged family system. Moreover, after Buteau rapes her, Françoise realises that she had always loved him, ‘elle n’en avait jamais aimé, elle n’en aimerait jamais un autre’ (p. 417; ‘she had never loved and would never love anyone else’, p. 368) and this is possibly an additional reason as to why she leaves him the land despite his brutality. Once more, the earth becomes the vehicle through which feelings are expressed; it is the only important member, superior to any type of kinship and emotions, and in order to maintain the system’s integrity, it sentences to death one of its elements. Paraphrasing Henri Mitterand, the fertile and nourishing earth is also an evil step-mother who is indifferent to the misery of men and who takes pleasure in transforming them into greedy animals, obsessed only with lust and

slaughtering.<sup>198</sup>

With Françoise dead and no deed, Buteau and Lise can throw Jean out and take possession of the house and land again, an action that, according to Professor Riikka Rossi, highlights ‘the negation of all the innate, “natural” laws of family affection’.<sup>199</sup> In fact, Zola writes, ‘le soir, l’un et l’autre semblèrent tout à fait rentrés chez eux, et il n’y avait que le cercueil qui les embarrassât, maintenant, dans la chambre dont il barrait le milieu’ (p. 444; ‘that evening both of them looked completely at home again, and only the coffin was in their way now, blocking the middle of the room’, p. 393). The passage enhances one final time how the reacquisition of one’s land and home powerfully overshadows the death of a family member. Jean, meanwhile, grasps the depth of his isolation, as Zola writes ‘jamais il n’avait eu si pénible le sensation d’être un étranger, de n’avoir pas un des siens, parmi ces gens, tous alliés, tous d’accord, dès qu’il s’agissait de l’exclure’ (p. 444; ‘he felt such a disagreeable sensation of having no one on his side amongst these people, who were all in league, all in accord, when it came to excluding him’, p. 393). As we have claimed before, the disengaged family reacts only when a major threat is imminent or taking place, which in turn leads to the alliance of all the family’s members, who work collectively to uproot the issue. In fact, Jean does not insist on regaining his wife’s land, ‘une fierté le remettait d’aplomb, content de ne point en être, de ces coquins, d’être l’étranger. Ils pouvaient bien se dévorer entre eux : un fameux débarras, s’ils s’avalait tous!’ (p. 466; ‘a feeling of pride restored his peace of mind; he was happy not to be one of them, not to be one of those mongrels, to be an outsider. They could all devour each other if they wanted: good riddance if they ate each other alive’, p. 414). He therefore leaves La Beauce, to join the army again and start a new journey.

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<sup>198</sup> Henri Mitterand, *Passion les délires de la vérité: Émile Zola* (Paris: Textuel, 2002), p. 93.

<sup>199</sup> Rossi, ‘Transgression, Nostalgia, Order’, p. 260.

If, as we explained earlier, Jean represents external pressure, which is catalyst for the Fouans' family defensive system to be put in place, we can read transversally the Rougon-Macquart family throughout the twenty novels of Zola's series, as having a similar sort of function. In fact, as introduced at the beginning of this chapter, Adélaïde Fouque's offspring, with specificity to the Macquart branch to which Jean belongs, is a carrier of profound psychological disturbances and severe social distress, and tends to produce elements representing a menace to society. Antoine Macquart's idleness and cunning, the alcoholism to which Gervaise Macquart is susceptible from an early age, the mental pathologies, clear in Jacques, Gervaise's son, who feels the urge to kill women, and prostitution with Nana, are traits that render them extraordinary characters, who struggle to find their place in the external environment, namely society, as they are out-of-the-ordinary individuals. We can argue that similarly to Jean, who cannot find his place within the Fouans' family system, because he is a foreigner, and is eventually expelled from La Beauce, the members of the Macquart's lineage, from a macroscopic point of view, seem to induce society to put in place a defensive system that marginalises them to social outcasts and pariahs, a status, which eventually leads them to their death, in order to preserve its homeostasis.<sup>200</sup>

From an initial reading of *La Terre*, therefore, Jean seems to represent the threatening aspect of his original Macquart family, in the microcosm of La Beauce. However, Jean is depicted in *La Fortune des Rougon* as a strong-willed child who 'grandit avec la volonté

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<sup>200</sup> Antoine Macquart dies of spontaneous combustion caused by the amount of alcohol in his system as narrated by Pascal in Zola, *Le Docteur Pascal*, p. 240. Gervaise Macquart as well dies drunk and in poverty. See Zola, *L'Assommoir*, p. 358. Jacques Lantier is killed on the rails of the train as he is fighting his lover's partner. See Zola, *La Bête Humaine*, p. 399. Nana, after losing her child to smallpox, contracts the same disease and dies alone. Zola, *Nana*, p. 402.

tenace de se faire un jour une position indépendante. Il fréquenta assidûment l'école' ('grew up with the determination of some day making an independent position for himself. He attended school diligently').<sup>201</sup> Thanks to this aspect of his character he is able to escape at an early age from his dysfunctional nucleus and to distance himself from a bullying and exploiting father like Antoine Macquart, and to develop resilience to tragic and painful life events such as his experience of war as seen in *La Débâcle*, and his unfortunate marriage to Françoise in *La Terre*. These characteristics make Jean in my opinion not only free of the Rougon-Macquart's psychological and social pathologies, but also one of the few, if not the only functional element of the whole Macquart branch.<sup>202</sup> This functionality seems to concretise in *Le Docteur Pascal* when Jean is finally able to create his new family system, uncoupled and independent from his original one. He in fact settles down in the village of Valqueyras near Plassans, where he marries Mélanie Vial, only daughter of a wealthy peasant, whose lands he calmly and diligently ploughs. Therefore Jean returns to work the land but this time, contrarily to what we saw in *La Terre*, his spousal and parental systems appear functional 'Il crée rapidement toute une petite famille, un enfant d'abord, puis deux autres en trois années, toute une nichée qui pousse gaillardement au soleil' ('he had created for himself a small family, first a son, then two more children in three years, a whole nest that grew strong under the sun').<sup>203</sup> A true success in Minunchian light.

Going back to our investigation of *La Terre*, as Jean sets forth again, Fouan's *anabasis* is almost at an end. When he re-enters Buteau's system, the coalition between his son and

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<sup>201</sup> Zola, *La Fortune des Rougon*, p. 162. Zola, *The Fortune of the Rougons*, p. 134.

<sup>202</sup> Émile Zola, *La Débâcle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984).

<sup>203</sup> Zola, *Le Docteur Pascal*, p. 159. Émile Zola, *Doctor Pascal*, trans. by Sheila Michell (Gloucester: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1989), p. 126.

Lise seems stronger than ever, and they finally manage to discover his 'magot'. Buteau steals it from Fouan and refuses to give it back, pretending to be safeguarding it for his father, weakened by a 'congestion cerebral' (p. 383; 'stroke', p. 335). Fouan's loss of authority and autonomy is now complete, and this leads him to lose his identity as well. In fact his nest egg, so his money, his land and his authoritarian character were the features that composed his identity as an individual.

La vie demeurait commune, il couchait là, mangeait là, il les voyait, les coudoyait du matin au soir ; et pas un regard, pas un mot, l'air d'un aveugle et d'un muet, la promenade traînante d'une ombre, au milieu de vivants (p. 399).

They continued to live together, he slept and ate there, he saw them and crossed their paths; but there was never a look or a word, he dragged himself wearily around like a spectre amongst the living, as though stricken dumb and blind (p. 351).

At Buteau's, following the loss of his identity, Fouan's journey seems to terminate. If a functioning journey should conclude when the individual has gained autonomy and independence, and has shaped his own identity, Fouan's regressive example in this regard ends when the person has stopped being an individual, losing not only his autonomy and independence, but also his identity. In addition, Fouan has become an accomplice to Françoise's murder as he saw Lise killing her and kept silent. However, to protect Jean, Fouan urges him to leave La Beauce stating: 'Ils te saigneront', he tells the Corporal, 'comme ils ont saigné la petite!' (p. 459; 'They [Buteau and Lise] will kill you, like they killed the little one!', p. 408). Hearing his father's words, Buteau realises he is in danger of being exposed. Therefore, he and his wife smother him in his sleep and then set fire to his body



making it look like an accident.<sup>204</sup> However, we can infer that death for Fouan represents freedom and a final sense of independence, as he is able to leave La Beauce spiritually – no longer subjected to the land, nor to his offspring's newly found authority. In fact, up until the moment of his death, even though he had given the land away, it had never abandoned him, as it kept guiding the type of relationships Fouan had with his children. The land had therefore continued to be a fundamental factor in his life. Paradoxically, his peregrinations, which we have defined as regressive because Fouan was always on a level of dependence with his children, becomes in reality a progression towards the only kind of autonomy the land allows one to have, namely death.

At the same time, we can interpret death as the rightful conclusion to Fouan's *anabasis*. As Jesus Christ had foreseen in his statement, 'once you're dead you'll get all the land you want' (p. 270), Fouan's death symbolises his return to what Susan Hennessy defines as the earth's 'maternal womb'.<sup>205</sup> From his point of view, he is finally able to coalesce and merge with the land he had loved passionately all his life. I believe this second interpretation of Fouan's death to be the more coherent with the enmeshed traits of the relationship between the old man and the earth. This entanglement takes concrete form in the fusion of his body and the land. Fouan is once again a pawn and his passing becomes the instrument that induces rebirth and keeps the land alive. The author in fact reports 'la matière décomposée retournait à la matrice commune, la mort allait refaire de la vie' (p. 377; 'decomposed matter was returning to Mother Earth; death would produce new life', p. 331).

Conclusively, as Guy Robert observes '*La Terre* n'est pas riche en enseignements sur

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<sup>204</sup> Zola, *Earth*, p. 411.

<sup>205</sup> Susan Hennessy, 'Zola's Male Creation: Reproduction in *Les Rougon-Macquart*', *The French Review*, 72 (1999), 1010-1022 (p. 1011). Concept found also in Cremers, 'Fraçoise dans *La Terre*', p. 346.

les travaux champêtres; ils fournissent surtout à Zola l'occasion de montrer le geste de l'homme en lutte avec la terre, et comment ce geste, il le saisit et le transfigure' (*The Earth* is not rich in lessons on field works; above all, these provide Zola with the opportunity to show the man's deeds as he struggles against the earth, and how such struggles enclose and transfigure him', my translation).<sup>206</sup> The regional macrocosm, which includes characters and the territory they inhabit, displays a degree of gender ambiguity: on the one hand, the region resembles what we called an archetypal female as it metaphorically attracts and seduces the male characters, placing them in a position of submission, while on the other hand, the macrocosm appears to operate as a patriarch, because of his hierarchical role as head of the family and because it manipulates the fate of its 'children'. Like Freud's 'closed system', the region is close-knit and maintains all its energy inside itself.<sup>207</sup> The land, as part of the region, develops an enmeshed relationship with each member of the analysed family, hindering their separation, journey and consequent growth. In support of this notion, the author Heinrich Mann has observed: 'Ici où la personne agissante est la terre elle-même qui engendre et dévore ses créatures auxquelles elle ne consent aucune liberté, aucun désir, aucune pensée en dehors de la loi qu'elle leur impose et qui dicte toutes leurs actions, bonnes ou criminelles' ('Here, where the acting person is the earth itself that engenders and devours its creatures to which it does not consent any freedom, any desire, any thought outside that law which it imposes on them and which dictates all their actions, good or criminal').<sup>208</sup> In the novel, Jesus

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<sup>206</sup> Guy Robert, *'La Terre' d'Émile Zola: étude historique et critique* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1952), p. 277.

<sup>207</sup> Franco Crespi and Fabrizio Fornari, *Introduzione alla sociologia della conoscenza* (Rome: Donzelli, 1998), p. 71.

<sup>208</sup> Heinrich Mann, *L'écrivain dans son temps, essais sur la littérature française (1780/1930)* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2002), p. 147.

Christ tries to leave the region, but the latter seems to call him back – only to then reduce him to a state of subjugation. Therefore, the meaning of his alcoholism evolve from our understanding of self-therapy to a sort of punishment the earth inflicts on him for having attempted to abandon it.

The only complete journey the regional macrocosm seems to allow is Fouan's. However, he moves backwards metaphorically, as he regresses from autonomous individual, to dependent mere thing. Leaving his land to his children, Fouan has left the system of La Beauce where everyone is subjected to the land, and his existence therefore loses all meaning.

Rebellious wanderings in *The Return of the Native*

Scholars such as Gianni Rovera, Raymond Chapman, Ian Gregor and Jean Brooks, tended overall to expose how Hardy's stylistic modernity would place the background onto the foreground, and so render the region, the landscape and the British countryside as the real protagonists of his novels.<sup>209</sup> I believe that here, again, scholars have overlooked the different significances the region can acquire in the novel and the notion that the region itself as an allegorical family can direct and control the life outcomes of the protagonists.

The title of Hardy's novel creates the expectation of a specific pattern of movement, namely that of an initial separation from a place and the subsequent return to it. Moreover, another aspect of the novel's title leads us to investigate is that of 'the native'. We shall in fact study the differences between native and non-native dwellers of Egdon, but also in relation to their attitudes towards the region. Here, too, family system theory can help us unlock the symbolical meaning behind this act of travelling back, also through the lenses of a possible failure to become autonomous and individualise. The first original family nucleus consists in the triad formed by the natives Mrs Yeobright, her son Clym and her niece Thomasin. As the novel begins, we are told that this original family system has already undergone a substantial change in its structure, since Clym left the family years previously to become a diamond merchant in Paris. In addition, the same system is experiencing another alteration in structure, as Thomasin is about to be married. Thus, it should fall on Mrs Yeobright to provide the

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<sup>209</sup> Rovera, *Poetica dello spazio*, p. 7. Raymond Chapman, *The Language of Thomas Hardy* (New York: Macmillan, 1990), p. 37. Ian Gregor, 'Landscape with Figures', in *Thomas Hardy's The Return of the Native*, ed. by Bloom, pp. 67-94 (p. 69). Jean Brooks, 'The Return of the Native: A Novel of Environment', in *Thomas Hardy's The Return of the Native*, ed. by Bloom, pp. 21-38 (p. 23).

young people with functional tools to separate, grow up and form their own systems; furthermore, as the remaining exponent of the original system, she must adapt to the profoundly changed structure of her family without hindering the younger members' individualisation.

At the beginning of the novel, we learn that Mrs Yeobright has encouraged Clym to leave and (albeit grudgingly) has put aside her opposition to Thomasin's marriage to the innkeeper of the Quiet Woman Damon Wildeve. Nonetheless we are soon able to detect dysfunctional aspects in the family unit. On the day of Thomasin's wedding, a bureaucratic mistake, caused by Wildeve's negligence, means the ceremony cannot take place and must be postponed. Disappointed and ashamed, Thomasin cannot but return home to her aunt: 'Excuse me – for humiliating you, aunt, by this mishap: I am sorry for it. But I cannot help it'.<sup>210</sup> This is the day where Thomasin should have started her own new family, but instead she has to revert to her original one. She must 'return', a concept, which in the novel functions to highlight, among other things, frustrated and failed attempts to gain one's independence. As we shall see later with Clym, Thomasin has not yet acquired her autonomy and requires a parental figure to come to her aid when a problem arises. In his characterisation of Thomasin, Hardy underlines her youth, plain, unaffected beauty and guileless, honest disposition: 'A fair, sweet and honest country face was revealed [...] it was between pretty and beautiful. [...] She seemed to belong rightly to a madrigal – to require viewing through rhyme and harmony' (p. 41). All this contributes to assign her the role of helpless child in the family's structure.

While in *La Terre* the families offered no solidarity or support, Mrs Yeobright here is willing to help Thomasin. The night of the failed wedding, she immediately reacts in a determined and pragmatic way: 'I am going to the inn to see if he [Wildeve] has returned. Of

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<sup>210</sup> Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, p. 43. All further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

course I shall get to the bottom of this story at once. Mr Wildeve must not suppose he can play tricks upon me, or any belonging to me' (p. 44). Her words reveal an entangled web of emotions – not only affection and protectiveness towards Thomasin, but also anger and disappointment. Earlier, she tells her crestfallen niece: 'I could almost say it serves you right' (p. 43). The use of the phrase 'or any belonging to me' underlines an enmeshed aspect in Mrs Yeobright's attitude, whereby Thomasin becomes a sort of property Mrs Yeobright tries to safeguard against external threats. Mrs Yeobright's interventionist approach signals her deep involvement in her niece's affairs. The young woman is thus shielded, as if she were a child, and her autonomy is handicapped. As Minuchin claims, 'the enmeshed family responds to any variation from the accustomed with excessive speed and intensity'.<sup>211</sup> When a problem does indeed arise, the supportive mechanisms of the family immediately reacts, and consequently Mrs Yeobright goes to Wildeve to solve the misunderstanding: 'Such things don't happen for nothing, it's a great slight to me and my family; and when it gets known there will be a very unpleasant time for us' (p. 45).

It is thus the aunt who indirectly solves this impasse, convincing Wildeve to marry her niece. She achieves this by piquing his vanity, telling him he has a rival: 'You may not be aware that another man has shown himself anxious to marry Thomasin. Now, though I have not encouraged him yet, I cannot conscientiously refuse him a chance any longer' (p. 96). Mrs Yeobright also suspects Wildeve of having a secret relationship with Eustacia Vye, a young, mysterious woman, who both frightens and attracts the people of the heath. Feeling spurned, on the night of the failed wedding, Eustacia severs the liaison with Wildeve, whom she had grown tired of anyway. A character who plays a crucial role in their separation is Diggory Venn, the man who on the heath sells sheep reddling to the farmers. Throughout the novel he constantly keeps an eye on Thomasin moved by his affection for her, ensuring what he

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<sup>211</sup> Minuchin, *Families and Family Therapy*, p. 55.

believes to be her happiness. Diggory, in fact, not only pressures Eustacia to make the decision to leave Wildeve ‘’Tis in your power, I assure you, Miss Vye, to do a great deal of good to another woman [Thomasin]’ (p. 89), but he also carries her ‘break-up’ letter to the man himself who claims ‘Well, I suppose I deserve it’ (p. 150). At this point, Wildeve has no alternative but to keep his word and marry Thomasin. Mrs Yeobright, in this case, does not seem to provide Thomasin the necessary tools to grow up and be able to overcome arising obstacles on her own. Moreover, manoeuvring Wildeve into marrying Thomasin places the aunt on a level of superiority and allows her to play an authority role even in her niece’s newly formed family system, underlining even more the older woman’s officiousness and her enmeshed attitude.

In truth, as Minuchin explains, all families move along an imaginary line, the extremes of which are the disengaged and enmeshed pathologies. While Mrs Yeobright demonstrated an exaggerated flexibility in terms of boundaries, when she ‘interferes’ in her niece’s involvement with Wildeve, Thomasin reacts to her aunt’s intrusiveness with a disengaged attitude. In fact, she asks her not to come to the wedding: ‘I don’t think I will ask you to come, it would be unpleasant. I am only your niece, and there is no necessity why you should concern yourself more about me’ (p. 154). These harsh, self-deprecating words demonstrate a scarce, if not absent, affective and emotional relationship with Mrs Yeobright, which we might expect from a disengaged attitude. At the same time, they can be read as Thomasin’s attempt to separate from her original family system, in order to create an independently new one. The reason why Thomasin is able to really separate is probably due to the fact that the young woman is not Mrs Yeobright’s daughter, but her niece, so somehow a lesser member of the family from the point of view of both the role she covers, ‘I am only your niece’ she states, and the emotional involvement she shares with her aunt. Even though they have an enmeshed relationship, this is not as profoundly rooted and to a certain extent imprisoning as

the one between mother and son we shall analyse with Clym.

After her separation, Thomasin is able to marry and establish her own family system; however, if on the one hand she comes from an enmeshed system, on the other hand her relationship with her husband is a deeply disengaged one. Once again, similar to *La Terre*, the spousal subsystem does not exchange feelings but is established as a consequence of responsibilities and commitments towards the preservation of the status quo. The subsystem is not made of a loving alliance or reciprocal accommodation. As Thomasin herself explains, 'I am a practical woman now. I don't believe in hearts and all' (p. 153). Additionally, she lets it slip with her aunt that her husband fails to provide adequately for her comfort: 'I want some money, some to buy little things for myself and he doesn't give me any' (p. 208), she tells her. The narrator underlines the distance in the couple by often describing husband and wife separately; in the entire novel, there are only three scenes featuring Thomasin and Wildeve together. The first scene, which takes place before the wedding, portrays Thomasin and Mrs Yeobright inside Wildeve's home, where they have come to request explanations of the failed marriage.<sup>212</sup> In this passage, Mrs Yeobright still guides Thomasin's actions, ordering her 'to confront him' (p. 44). The other two scenes occur after the wedding, and depict the couple alone in Wildeve's inn with no third party present.<sup>213</sup> Both times, Thomasin is waiting 'uneasily' (p. 334) for Wildeve's return from illicit meetings with Eustacia at a country-dance and at Mistover, sitting 'in an inner room' (p. 257) of the inn. What appears common to the three scenes is the concept that whenever Thomasin speaks in Wildeve's presence either before or after the marriage, he is quick to silence her or dismisses what she has to say: 'Sit still, that's all – and don't speak too much' (p. 48). When she timidly inquires whether he has been at the country fair, he contradicts her with a lie: 'That is a mistake – it must have been

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<sup>212</sup> See Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, p. 45.

<sup>213</sup> Cf., pp. 258, 335.



someone else' (p. 258). To cover up his real reasons for walking to Mistover, he cuts her off: 'Now, don't let us speak of the subject anymore' (p. 336). Wildeve uses his authority as head of the family to curtail communication and keep Thomasin in the dark. In fact, Wildeve continues to meet Eustacia Vye in secret and has no desire to commit to his new family with Thomasin and their child.

Not unlike Zola's Buteau, Wildeve appears to be interested only in money and women. Early on we are told that the good-looking, self-loving Wildeve 'had a pantomimic expression of a lady-killing career' (p. 45). This inherent tendency trumps any moral principles he might have to the point where he blames his wife's kindness for making him feel uncomfortable at his meetings with his lover Eustacia. In fact, Wildeve tells her 'I wish that Tamsie were not such a confoundedly good little woman, so that I could be faithful to you without injuring a worthy person' (p. 82). Another example of the similarity between Buteau and Wildeve can be found in his relationship with money. Wildeve in fact, not only refuses to give his wife money to buy what she desires, but he also tries to steal from her the sum Mrs Yeobright sends for her upkeep.<sup>214</sup> This leads Thomasin to be placed in a state of dependence on her husband, as he keeps hindering all her options for autonomy – a situation that does not change after the birth of their child. The first thing we are told is that Wildeve is unhappy 'because it is not a boy' (p. 304). We do not hear it directly from him but through Christian Cantle, a simple-minded young man who unwittingly causes major turning points in the plot. This second-hand report through the 'innocent' eyes of Christian clearly reveals the couple as extremely separated.

As in *La Terre*, the key role is played by none of the human agents but by the region itself, the barren Egdon landscape and its topography. Hardy maps with great care the physical movements of characters inside the region. These, as we shall see, heighten even

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid., p. 218.

more openly the profound connection between Egdon Heath and its inhabitants, whose paths crisscross in the walkable expanse of the heath. As we will see also in relation to *I Promessi Sposi*, Hardy's characters move on foot and rarely use carts, horses or any other means of transport to move around in the region. Besides being a marker of lower social status, as Michael Zeitler suggests walking enhances 'the close connection between regional people and natural world'.<sup>215</sup> As a macrocosmic family structure, Egdon and its inhabitants are deeply enmeshed. Clym, Eustacia, Wildeve and the others move like dots within a delimited space. Wildeve travels around the 'circle of heath-country' (p. 54), sometimes to meet Eustacia in their usual spot 'beyond the outer margin of the pool' (p. 61), and sometimes simply to wander. In his youth, Wildeve studied engineering in the 'wonderful place' (p. 91) of Budmouth (what Hardy called the seaside town of Weymouth). However, similarly to Jesus Christ, he gives up the profession many 'had hoped much from' (p. 44) to become a simple innkeeper in Egdon. Although detailed information on his character is overall scarce in the novel, his moving around might be the symptom of his existential restlessness, as he, like Eustacia, is insensitive to the beauty of the heath and is desperate to leave: 'God, how lonely it is! What are picturesque ravines and mists to us who see nothing else? Why should we stay here?' (p. 84). The region is a confined space, which does not allow journeys on a large scale. This produces, according to Ian Gregor, a sort of 'tension between land and character'.<sup>216</sup> Wildeve's wanderings on the heath can be interpreted as a compensatory mechanism to make up for what he perceives as an imprisonment.

If in *La Terre* each character in some way or another 'lusted' for the earth, in *The Return of the Native*, Wildeve and Eustacia loath life on Egdon and wish to escape. This makes them allegorically rebels in a traditional, rural macrocosmic system, as neither of them

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<sup>215</sup> Zeitler, *Representations of Culture*, p. 75.

<sup>216</sup> Gregor, 'Landscape with Figures', p. 70.

complies with Egdon's structure and roles. Towards the end of the novel, Wildeve unexpectedly inherits a large sum of money from an uncle in Canada and plans to elope with Eustacia.<sup>217</sup> In doing so, not only does he irremediably break the microcosmic family system he shared with Thomasin, but he also threatens to upset the equilibrium of the regional community. Moreover, as Lance Butler argues, in leaving Thomasin Wildeve leaves Egdon. Correspondingly, by abandoning Clym, also Eustacia abandons the heath.<sup>218</sup> In a kind of tragic retaliation that reasserts the power of Egdon's nature, Wildeve never manages to cross the borders of the region but drowns in the river together with Eustacia, 'he gave no sigh', the narrator describes 'there was too much reason to think that he and Eustacia both were forever beyond the reach of stimulating perfumes' (p. 358). The tone of the phrase seems cold and removed, and it perfectly represents the overall lack of pathos of a tragic moment whose events are mechanically listed. Being present at the scene we might expect Thomasin to be distraught by the sight of her husband's corpse. Instead, she seems to have an inadequate response, since 'for a moment she was distracted and horrified by this blow' (p. 358). Both the tone of the description and the use of the words 'for a moment' are elements that attest to the disengaged feature of the couple Thomasin/Wildeve that appears unable to express emotions even when death is involved. Acting as an enmeshed family system, the region itself punishes its rebel children with death. As we also see in Zola's novel, here the region holds supreme power over its inhabitants, able to block its members' desires for autonomy and preventing their growth and individualisation. In fact, according to Jean Brooks, 'Egdon Heath bears, shapes, nourishes, and kills conscious organisms'.<sup>219</sup> In this way the pathological equilibrium in the enmeshed macrocosmic family system is reinstated and preserved.

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<sup>217</sup> Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, p. 292.

<sup>218</sup> Lance Butler, *Thomas Hardy* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 39.

<sup>219</sup> Brooks, 'The Return of the Native: a Novel of Environment', p. 21.

Unlike her husband's, Thomasin's walks across the heath are not restless wanderings. She tells Wildeve 'There is only one thing unpleasant about Egdon. You never take me with you when you walk there' (p. 335). As an Egdon native, Thomasin loves the region: 'I like what I was born near to; I like Egdon Heath's grim old face' (p. 335). However, her movements are rather limited and she rarely leaves her home. First, it is the shame and dishonour caused by the failed marriage that force her to hide: 'Thomasin is now staying at her aunt's, shut up in a bedroom', we are told (p. 82), and later, during her pregnancy, it is agreed that 'in her present state of her health she must not go on walking so much' (p. 214). When she leaves her house, it is always to enter another. We see her mostly in domestic settings either at her aunt's or at Clym's home, underlining her lack of movement on a wider scale.<sup>220</sup> For this reason, she does not seem to stray allegorically from her path. The only time Thomasin is depicted roaming the heath occurs at the beginning of the novel, after Wildeve has jilted her. However, on this occasion Thomasin is led to stray not by her own free will, but by Wildeve's ambiguous intentions, which seem, for a moment, to drag the young woman into his own rebellious attitude towards the region. Nonetheless, Thomasin is assisted by Diggory Venn, a character faithful both to the region and to her, and someone who transports the woman home in the safety of his covered van.<sup>221</sup>

Besides this incident, Thomasin, overall, never travels far from her aunt or her husband's house, emblem of her family system, or tries to distance herself from the region. Similarly in some respects, to Manzoni's Lucia, Thomasin plays the role of obedient young woman and wife without explicitly rebelling either against Mrs Yeobright's control or her unhappy relationship with Wildeve. In addition, she proves her faithfulness to Egdon by stating 'I am not fit for town life – so very rural and silly as I always have been. [...] Egdon is

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<sup>220</sup> See Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, pp. 207, 300, 332.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

a ridiculous old place; but I have got used to it, and I couldn't be happy anywhere else at all' (p. 378). In return for her loyalty, or as scholar Simon Gatrell interprets it 'her metaphorical cooperation', Egdon rewards Thomasin with a new husband, home and land.<sup>222</sup> However, her profound dependence on the region underlines a lack of curiosity towards everything else that lies beyond it. In this regard, she forms a stark contrast to Eustacia and Wildeve, whose wandering symbolises rebelliousness and a desire for change. Her second marriage to Diggory Venn represents the resolution of conflicts within the plot. Even though, just like everyone else in the novel, Thomasin is subjected to Egdon's authority, its rules and traditions, she is the only character, together with her new husband, to be able to separate from her original family to create her own. As Sara Malton has claimed 'Thomasin marries not once but twice, and gives birth to a child thereby reconfirming her place within the status quo'.<sup>223</sup> However, she does undergo development and individualisation and this time, unlike at the start of the novel, she chooses to marry Diggory without asking for help and simply by communicating her decision to Clym as her equal in the family structure. She tells her cousin: 'It is going to be after all. [Diggory] thinks I may as well make up my mind, and I have got to think so too. It is to be on the twenty-fifth of next month' (p. 380). Now, in fact, Mrs Yeobright who had manipulated most of the major decisions in the young woman's life, is no longer an obstacle, as the author claims 'no firm and sensible Mrs Yeobright lived now' (p. 358). Interestingly, Thomasin appears to be metaphorically split in two: a part of her is projected towards autonomy and independence and is able to make decisions. Nonetheless, another part of her instead is strongly anchored to and dependent on the region, and it shows

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<sup>222</sup> Simon Gatrell, *Thomas Hardy and the Proper Study of Mankind* (London: Macmillan, 1993), p. 45.

<sup>223</sup> Sara Malton, 'The Woman Shall Bear her Iniquity: Death as Social Discipline in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*', *Studies in The Novel*, 32 (2000), 147-164 (p. 159).

no interest in venturing outside of it. As such, the macrocosmic system's boundaries for Thomasin are comfortably closed.

Clym too, the other member of Mrs Yeobright's original family system, appears deeply rooted in the heath. As seen above, at the beginning of the novel he returns to Egdon from Paris, where for many years he has worked as a diamond trader. Once home, he makes up his mind never to return to the frivolous world of Paris and the 'unmanly' activity of a jeweller. Instead he decides to 'become a schoolmaster to the poor and ignorant, to teach them what nobody else will' (p. 172). Once again, similarly to Jesus Christ's failed attempt at separating from La Beauce, we can hypothesise that Egdon exercises on Clym a strong, attractive and propulsive force that leads him to re-enter his mother's home and his original family system. Jakob Lothe actually claims that the heath 'exerts a powerful influence on the characters'.<sup>224</sup> In this case, conversely to the examples we found in *La Terre*, the region's recall appears indirect and subtler. Initially, Clym's return is presented just as a temporary visit to spend Christmas at home. However, it quickly becomes clear that he intends to leave Paris for good, and settle back in Egdon to help 'enlighten', as Roberto Dainotto suggests, his native community.<sup>225</sup> As we find with Thomasin, Clym has an even more enmeshed relationship with his mother, in that when he informs her of his intentions of staying in Egdon to live in a tiny cottage and becoming a schoolmaster, Mrs Yeobright's response appears initially severe and devoid of any emotion: 'I do not think likely I shall come to see you' (p. 207). In truth, this hides her attempt at interfering in her son's separation and individualisation, and it underlines deeply heightened communication issues and blurred

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<sup>224</sup> Jakob Lothe, 'Variants on Genre: *The Return of the Native*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *The Hand of Ethelberta*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Hardy*, ed. by Dale Kramer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 112-129 (p. 116).

<sup>225</sup> Dainotto, *Place in Literature*, p. 62.

boundaries in the family system.

In contrast to the short passages dedicated to Thomasin and Wildeve, the dialogues between Clym and his mother are numerous and extensive. Instead of providing him with the tools to individuate and develop through his new plan, Mrs Yeobright states: 'After all the trouble that has been taken to give you a start, when there is nothing to do but to keep straight on towards affluence, you say you will be a poor man's schoolmaster. Your fancies will be your ruin, Clym' (p. 172). Here, it is possible to perceive the conflict between Mrs Yeobright's social expectations for her son, and Clym's actual working plans. In addition, the mother's words foreshadow Clym's ruin. Mrs Yeobright seems unable to support Clym as she did when he went to Paris. As a result, when Clym tries to tell her again of his intentions, she shuts him down, thus allowing no support or consequent autonomy: 'I fully expected that in the course of a month or two you would have seen the folly of such self-sacrifice, and would have been by this time back again to Paris in some business or other' (p. 188).

Furthermore, the enmeshment in Clym's original family system intensifies when he decides to marry Eustacia Vye, who actually represents the symbolical tool that Clym needs to distance himself from his original family, to become independent and start his project. Mrs Yeobright explicitly voices her opposition to her son's plans to stay and marry Eustacia, telling him 'You are wasting your life here; and it is solely on account of her' (p. 188), Clym, on the other hand, does not let her subjugate him and departs from his mother apparently severing their rapport with the statement 'Mother, I am going to leave you' (p. 206). The moment Clym leaves his mother's house represents the beginning of his metaphorical regressive journey on the heath. Similarly to Fouan in *La Terre*, Clym undergoes a sort of *anabasis* from diamond merchant to blind furze-cutter, in order to re-acquire his role of native

in the regional macrocosmic system.<sup>226</sup>

In truth, Clym and Eustacia are as ill-suited to one another as Thomasin and Wildeve. Eustacia is an outsider to Egdon, a non-native who grew up in the fashionable seaside resort of Budmouth and owes her luscious, dark looks to her Corfiote father. Contrarily to Thomasin, who declares herself as ‘countrified’, Eustacia, as her grandfather claims, has ‘town tastes’ (p. 116) and longs for the excitement of city life; she is attracted to Clym because of his connection to Paris, the nineteenth-century capital of fashion and luxury. Clym instead feels a deep sense of belonging to Egdon: ‘To my mind it is most exhilarating, and strengthening, and soothing’ he tells her ‘I would rather live on these hills than anywhere else in the world’ (p. 183). It is one of the novel’s tragic ironies that Eustacia’s hatred of the region is the reason why she marries the ‘native’ Clym and that he resolves never to leave Egdon after he meets her. ‘Eustacia’s dream’, the narrator tells us, ‘had always been that, once married to Clym, she would have the power of inducing him to return to Paris’ (p. 233).

Hardy also establishes a contrast between the meek, static Thomasin and Eustacia, who, as Lothe suggests, aspires to visit Paris, ‘which is attractive because it is unknown’.<sup>227</sup> An orphan, she was taken to the rural countryside of Egdon by her grandfather, who has no authority over her. Sara Malton defines Eustacia as ‘a figure of threatening abnormality’ because she does not conform to gender roles.<sup>228</sup> In addition, and unlike Thomasin, she rarely stays home and always stalks the heath alone like a ‘rapacious animal’.<sup>229</sup> Rebuffing Clym’s

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<sup>226</sup> Compare Patricia Ann Alden, *Studies in Social Mobility: Gissing, Hardy, Bennett, and Lawrence* (Saginaw: University Microfilms International, 1979), p. 73.

<sup>227</sup> Lothe, ‘Variants on Genre’, p. 117.

<sup>228</sup> Malton, ‘The Woman Shall Bear her Iniquity’, p. 150.

<sup>229</sup> Kristin Brady, ‘Thomas Hardy and Matters of Gender’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Hardy*, ed. by Kramer, pp. 93-111 (p. 94).



offer to accompany her, she states: ‘I know the way home, and the heath has no terror for me’ (p. 248). Like a caged lioness, she goes on daily (and nightly) strolls in a struggle to free herself from her captivity. Besides disregarding Captain Vye’s feeble attempts to discipline her, Eustacia also refuses to submit to the natural forces of the heath. Making light of Wildeve’s warning not to walk home alone, she haughtily asks: ‘What could hurt me on this heath, who have nothing?’ (p. 255). Here, the use of ‘who’ clearly enhances the idea of the region as a living, sentient being – not a sensual female as in *La Terre* but as a menacing *pater familias*. Eustacia does not have much love for ‘her fellow-creatures’, either: ‘Sometimes I quite hate them’, she confesses to Clym (p. 183). Needless to say, her carelessness and sense of superiority towards Egdon will be punished. The people of Egdon, for their part, regard her as a stranger, even a ‘witch’ (p. 174) due to her eccentric behaviour, and so for this reason, if Clym must begin a regressive journey to regain his ‘nativeness’ in the region and as Bruce Johnson claims ‘to rediscover what is essential to life and to strip away the very luxuries of life’, Eustacia in parallel must endure Egdon’s punishment, in order to break her rebelliousness.<sup>230</sup>

Very soon, it emerges that Clym and Eustacia’s new microcosmic family system does not establish supportive mechanisms. Clym explains to his mother he is marrying Eustacia ‘For practical reasons: if I take a school’ he states, ‘an educated woman would be invaluable as a help to me’ (p. 193), thereby underlining the concept that he is making an instrumental use of Eustacia in order to follow through his plan and stay in Egdon. At the same time, Eustacia marries Clym – as we said – because he represents her only possible escape from the prison-like region she inhabits. In fact, although he has openly expressed his refusal to return to Paris, ‘I have vowed not to go back’ (p. 195), Clym has nonetheless promised her that after

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<sup>230</sup> Bruce Johnson, ‘Pastoralism and Modernity’, in *Thomas Hardy’s The Return of the Native*, ed. by Bloom, pp. 111-136 (p. 113).

his first six months of study, he would take her to her beloved Budmouth.<sup>231</sup> Such a lack of reciprocal accommodation is evident when Clym immerses himself so much in his studies to become schoolmaster that, as a result, he strains his eyesight to the point where he becomes almost blind. Consequently, he is unable to carry on with his plan, and so in order to earn some money he is contented to become a furze-cutter. Egdon's attractive force on Clym draws him closer, leading him to work in direct contact with the earth. In this respect, according to Gatrell, Clym seems to become 'representative example of the symbiosis between man and the region' in Egdon.<sup>232</sup> In addition, Clym's 'daily life was of a curious microscopic sort, his whole world being limited to a circuit of a few feet from his person' (p. 244). This passage enhances the idea that even Clym's handicap aims to make him understand that once back he must live in a narrowly circumscribed space. As Robert Schweik reports, 'Clym is trapped' as the region's boundaries appear to close down on him.<sup>233</sup> In this predicament, Eustacia shows no solidarity with her husband who, by now, has been 'transformed into an invalid' (p. 241). Despite his misfortune Clym is at ease with himself and sings while he works. Eustacia, thinking only of herself and how 'degrading his occupation was to her, as an educated lady-wife', yells in despair 'I would starve rather than do it! And you can sing!' (p. 246). The spousal subsystem deteriorates throughout the novel as communication between the members becomes poor and their disjunction stronger. It is not long before Eustacia starts to meet Wildeve in secret again.

In the meantime, Mrs Yeobright's enmeshed pattern of behaviour continues. When Eustacia accuses her of having been 'against [her] from the start', her mother-in-law replies

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<sup>231</sup> Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, p. 203.

<sup>232</sup> Gatrell, *Thomas Hardy and the Proper Study of Mankind*, p. 45.

<sup>233</sup> Robert Schweik, 'The Influence of Religion, Science, and Philosophy on Hardy's Writings', in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Hardy*, ed. by Kramer, pp. 54-72 (p. 58).

‘No. I was simply for Clym [...] It is the instinct of every one to look after their own’ (p. 236). Later, Eustacia blocks Mrs Yeobright from physically and symbolically entering the house she shares with Clym – and consequently the new family system of which she is ‘the queen’.<sup>234</sup> In fact, when Mrs Yeobright finally relents and walks to her son’s cottage to make amends, Eustacia does not answer the door, as she is in the company of Wildeve while in the adjacent room her husband is resting. Even though this is the real reason for her reticence in letting Mrs Yeobright in, she tells Wildeve ‘How can I open the door to her when she dislikes me – wishes to see not me, but her son? I won’t open the door!’ (p. 274). Once again, the hypocrisy in Eustacia’s words underlines an emotional crudeness and absolute self-concern. A deeply enmeshing character whose supportive mechanisms are ready to activate as soon as a problem arises, Mrs Yeobright cannot seem to endure the disengaged attitude of being ignored. On her way back home, she is bitten by an adder and dies, claiming in her dying words to be ‘a broken-hearted woman cast off by her son’ (p. 277). Mrs Yeobright’s death happens out of doors, directly on the heath, and so, in a way, she too is a victim of Egdon. In fact, despite her instinctive dislike for Eustacia, Mrs Yeobright is none too dissimilar from her:

The air with which she looked at the heathmen betokened a certain unconcern at their presence [...] this indirectly implying that in some respect or other they were not up to her level. The explanation lays in the fact that she herself was a curate’s daughter, who had once dreamt of doing ‘better things’ (p. 35).

It is her ambition that spurred her son to go to Paris, and his return is a defeat for her. Her rejection of regional life marks her as an outsider and so in order to maintain the region’s

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<sup>234</sup> See Clym’s statement in *The Return of the Native*, p. 246.

equilibrium intact, she must be eliminated. Even in this case the region and its natural landscape represent the hidden authority deciding the fate of every character. As Michael Zeitler claims, ‘the heath has its true tale to tell’ and will mete out punishments and rewards accordingly.<sup>235</sup>

When Eustacia finds out that Mrs Yeobright is dead, she keeps her rebuff a secret. Unfeelingly, she tells Clym ‘You give yourself up too much to this wearying despair. Other men’s mothers have died’ (p. 299). But when Clym discovers the truth, he turns just as cold toward her: ‘Forgive you I never can’, he tells Eustacia. ‘How could there be any good in a woman that everybody spoke ill of?’ (p. 318). With this statement Clym determines the end of his marriage, blaming all responsibilities on Eustacia without considering his own, in particular his unkept promise to take her to Budmouth. This moment underlines on the one hand the logical conclusion of a disengaged family system. On the other hand, the passage also enhances his lack of separation from his original system and a deep enmeshment with both the common way of thinking of Egdon and his maternal figure, as he wonders ‘Can a man be too cruel to his mother’s enemy?’ (p. 333).

Once the spousal subsystem is broken, Eustacia makes a last attempt to run away from Egdon with Wildeve, but she never makes it out alive, as she throws herself, or falls (the ambiguity persists to this day) in the river and drowns together with her lover, who dives in after her in an attempt to save her. However, we are told that ‘the story of the deaths of Eustacia and Wildeve was told throughout Egdon, and far beyond’ (p. 365). In a remedial way, Eustacia’s death enables her finally to leave the region. Sarah Malton has claimed that Eustacia kills herself to be finally free, an interpretation, which in part I agree with.<sup>236</sup> However, if we shift the point of view from Eustacia to Egdon Heath, so from individual to

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<sup>235</sup> See Zeitler, *Representations of Culture*, p. 73.

<sup>236</sup> Malton, ‘The Woman Shall Bear her Iniquity’, p. 160.

environment, we can refute the critic's claim proposing the concept that it is, in truth, the region that leads Eustacia to commit suicide. Carol Reed Andersen has shown how in the novel 'the human scale diminishes to insect scale; and the heath asserts its significance'.<sup>237</sup> This idea renders the death of the woman a punishment rather than liberation. In effect, the region repeatedly tries to eliminate Eustacia's presence, which threatens its immutable equilibrium. As Jakob Lothe suggests, there appears to be 'no escape from the heath'.<sup>238</sup> Eustacia instead longs to separate and is therefore incompatible with such an ingrained family system. In Egdon, she is labelled a witch and pricked with a needle in church to stave off her supposed spellworking. Her dreams of Paris are shattered through her husband's self-inflicted blindness, rendering her spousal subsystem irremediably broken.<sup>239</sup> In a way, Egdon tries to tame, subjugate, and finally integrate Eustacia, but never succeeds and she is led to die alongside Wildeve.

By contrast, Clym is saved and goes back to live in his mother's home with Thomasin. His regressive journey ends here as he is allowed to fulfil his initial plan of becoming a teacher: 'Yeobright had found his vocation in the career of an itinerant open-air preacher and lecturer on morally unimpeachable subjects' (p. 389). Paraphrasing Rosemary Sumner, the fact that Clym survives at the end of the novel and finds for himself a role that is not too different from his original plan 'is due to his sense of belonging to and being part of the

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<sup>237</sup> Carol Reed Andersen, 'Time, Space, and Perspective in Thomas Hardy', *Nineteenth-century Fiction*, 9 (1954), 192-208 (p. 197). See also Simon Gatrell, *Thomas Hardy Writing Dress* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011), p. 215.

<sup>238</sup> Lothe, 'Variants on Genre', p. 119.

<sup>239</sup> See Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, pp. 178, 186, 245.

heath'.<sup>240</sup> In fact, Clym's regressive journey after his return to the heath shifts from being an anabasis to becoming a catharsis. He regains his title of 'native' by detaching himself from Eustacia, because establishing with her a spousal subsystem made him a partial outcast. Nevertheless, when he relinquishes her, he becomes a true member of Egdon, even partaking in the superstitious belief that she has evil powers. At their final meeting, he warns her: 'don't look at me with those eyes as if you would bewitch me again!' (p. 316), thereby officially re-entering the macrocosmic family system.

In conclusion, in *The Return of the Native* also, the regional space seems to work as an entangled *pater familias* who does not permit his children to leave the family, thus representing in this case the supreme authority to which every member is subjected. However, conversely to Zola's *La Terre*, where the region not only did not allow any kind of separation, but was also indifferent to its members' love for it, in Hardy's novel Egdon subjugates the characters and yet it seems also to reward them when they recognise its authority and prove their sense of loyalty and belonging.

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<sup>240</sup> Rosemary Sumner, *Thomas Hardy: Psychological Novelist* (London: Macmillan, 1981), p. 115.

A Regional Odyssey in *I promessi sposi*

In the case of Manzoni's *I promessi sposi*, critics have focused on a number of themes such as language (Claudio Morazzini, Bruno Migliorini and Giorgio De Rienzo), society and religious providence (Peter Burke and Sergio Romagnoli) and nationalism and politics (Mirto Golo Stone, Ezio Raimondi, Angelandrea Zottoli, and Giuliana Sanguinetti).<sup>241</sup> There are also a number of authors such as Giovanni Getto and Stanley Bernard Chandler who have examined the landscape depicted in the background of the protagonists' journey.<sup>242</sup> However, this is

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<sup>241</sup> Claudio Marazzini, *La storia della lingua italiana attraverso i testi* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2006), p. 178. Migliorini, *Storia della lingua italiana*, p. 552. Giorgio De Rienzo, *L'avventura della parola ne I promessi sposi* (Rome: Bonacci, 1980), p. 35. Peter Burke, 'L'histoire dans un genre neuf: *I promessi sposi* come storia sociale', in *Il Romanzo*, ed. by Moretti, pp. 263-275. Sergio Romagnoli, 'Lingua e società ne *I promessi sposi*', in *Atti del convegno manzoniano di Nimega*, ed. by Carlo Ballerini (Florence: Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, 1974), pp. 129-156. Mirto Golo Stone, 'Contro la modernità e la cultura borghese: *I promessi sposi* e l'ascesa del romanzo italiano', *MLN*, 107 (1992), 112-131 (p. 117). Ezio Raimondi, '*I promessi sposi* e la ricerca della giustizia', *MLN*, 83 (1968), 1-15 (p. 4). Angelandrea Zottoli, *Umili e potenti nella poetica di A. Manzoni* (Milan: La Cultura, 1942), p. 45. Giuliana Sanguinetti Katz, '*I promessi sposi* e la psicanalisi', in *Perspectives on Nineteenth-Century Italian Novels*, ed. by Guido Pugliese (Ottawa, ONT: Dovehouse, 1989), pp. 77-88 (p. 82).

<sup>242</sup> Giovanni Getto, 'La redenzione di Renzo', in *Conoscere I promessi sposi*, ed. by Gorizio Viti (Florence: Le Monnier, 1994), pp. 267-272 (p. 269). Stanley Bernard Chandler, *Alessandro Manzoni The Story of a Spiritual Quest* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1974), p. 88.

never analysed to shed light on the outcomes of the relationship between the protagonists and the territory but rather as a realistic landscape that helps the reader collocate the story in space and time.

In contrast to *La Terre* and *The Return of the Native*, the characters in Alessandro Manzoni's *I promessi sposi* undergo a physical journey that culminates in their psychological growth – and therefore in their achievement of a functional form of independence and autonomy. Such process of separation and growth is expressed in the novel, as I aim to show, through what can be called a true, this time genuinely progressive regional odyssey. Here, the family unit is composed of the eponymous betrothed, Renzo Tramaglino and Lucia Mondella, and Agnese, Lucia's mother. Renzo is an orphan and has established with Agnese a mother/son relationship. He explicitly calls her 'la nostra mamma' (p. 621; 'a mother to both of us', p. 693), and she talks about him to Lucia saying 'Da che comincio a discorrerti, l'ho sempre riguardato come un mio figliuolo' (p. 432; 'For ever since Renzo began courting you, I've thought of him as a son', p. 485). In order to be able to marry at the end of the novel, Renzo and Lucia must undergo a process of disentanglement and individualisation from their allegorical position of siblings in the original family system. Only after what we will analyse as separate journeys, will they be able to establish a spousal subsystem occupying the positions of husband and wife, and a parental one with the roles of mother and father.

The novel opens on the day on which the betrothed should have been married. The long-awaited moment has come, and Renzo eagerly goes to fetch the curate who should celebrate the wedding:

Renzo non si fece molto aspettare. Appena gli parve ora di poter, senza indiscrezione, presentarsi al curato, v'andò con la lieta furia d'un uomo di vent'anni, che deve in quel giorno sposare quella che ama.



Renzo did not keep Don Abbondio waiting long. As soon as he felt he could decently do so, he walked round to the curé's house, with the happy eagerness of a man of twenty on the day of his wedding to the girl he loves.<sup>243</sup>

From this quote it is clear how the relationship between Renzo and Lucia appears to be different from the disengaged ones we have encountered up until now. Renzo's 'lieta furia' ('happy eagerness') to marry Lucia gives proof to his disinterested love for the young girl who, like him, is a common villager with neither wealth nor prospects. However, the curate, Don Abbondio, refuses to celebrate the ceremony as he has been threatened by Don Rodrigo's *bravi* (henchmen). Don Rodrigo, a powerful warlord, is infatuated with Lucia and had a bet about her with his cousin Attilio. As with *The Return of the Native*, the novel begins with the failed attempt of a young couple to get married, although, in this case, the opposition comes entirely from an external force. Once home, Renzo informs both women of the setback and similarly to Mrs Yeobright, Agnese starts to give Renzo and Lucia advice on what they should do. Agnese seeks to establish her authority: 'Sentite, figliouli; date retta a me, io son venuta al mondo prima di voi e il mondo lo conosco un poco' (p. 41; 'Listen, children, and take my advice. I've been in this world longer than you, and I know something about it', p. 61). Her suggested course of action comes to nothing, and Lucia asks for the aid of another parental figure, the wise and saint-like friar Padre Cristoforo, who immediately reassures them: 'Sentite, figliouli, io anderò oggi a parlare a quell'uomo' (p. 73; 'Listen, my children, I will go and talk to the man today', p. 95). Padre Cristoforo 'occupies the space of authority left empty by the absence of Agnese's husband' in this system and takes it upon himself to

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<sup>243</sup> Manzoni, *I promessi sposi*, p. 26. Manzoni, *The Betrothed*, p. 46. All further references to these editions are given after quotations in the text.

confront Don Rodrigo on their behalf.<sup>244</sup> His paternalistic attitude highlights how Renzo and Lucia are still regarded as defenceless children and they seem to represent the siblings in the family structure and cannot therefore be married. The parental figures of both Agnese, a true mother, and Padre Cristoforo, a symbolical father, seem to create a sort of entangled family system as when a problem arises their supportive mechanism immediately activates, thereby protecting the children whose autonomy is limited. The role of siblings I attributed to Renzo and Lucia seem to underline the innocence of their relationship which, in the novel, discloses no sexual connotation, contrasting with Eustacia's sexuality and, as we shall see in the next chapter, with the animalistic eroticism of *La Terre*'s characters.<sup>245</sup>

When also Padre Cristoforo's plan seems to fail – 'Non c'è nulla da sperare dall'uomo', he admits (p. 99; 'There's nothing to be hoped from that man', p. 123) – the trio is forced to depart from their small village, the name of which is never mentioned by the author, and starts its journey through the region of Lombardy. At the beginning this forced journey is perceived as a profoundly painful exile from the native mountain village and landscape – and the consequent loss of one's identity. Addressing the mountains themselves, the narrator sighs: 'Quanto è tristo il passo di chi, cresciuto tra voi, se ne allontana!' (p. 138; 'With what a melancholy tread any man must leave you who has grown up in your mist', p. 164). However, this also represents the first step in the separation and individualisation of the family members, and it is noteworthy how the native village and, obviously, the regional

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<sup>244</sup> Susanna Ferlito, 'Fear of the Mother's Tongue: Secrecy and Gossip in Manzoni's *I promessi sposi*', *MLN*, 113 (1998), 30-51 (p. 42). Minuchin, Minuchin and Colapinto, *Working with Families of the Poor*, p. 15.

<sup>245</sup> On Manzoni's emphasis on Renzo and Lucia's innocence see Luciano Parisi, 'Alessandro Manzoni's *I promessi sposi*: A Chaste Novel and an Erotic Palimpsest', *The Modern Language Review*, 2 (2008), 424-437 (p. 425).

space allows its inhabitants to separate, in contrast to La Beauce and Egdon Heath, which as we witnessed carried out revenge and punishments against those who tried to depart. Renzo, Lucia and Agnese begin an actual journey full of adventures and variety, a true, small-scale odyssey across Lombardy and beyond, and so for this reason, the protagonists use multiple means of transportations to move from one place to another. It will be important for us to analyse these conveyances in order to detect how they become the key routes through which the characters reach autonomy and independence.

Starting their journey, Renzo, Lucia and Agnese must exit their village near the Lake of Como to reach Monza. They do so via boat, which awaits them on the shores of the lake. The boat is a mode of transportation, which often in literature, as we can see in Homer's *Odyssey*, Dante's *Inferno* and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, sets the protagonists off on their journey.<sup>246</sup> Moreover, comparably to Dante's boat that ferries the dead souls from the world of the living to the afterlife, Manzoni's boat carries the protagonists through the regional macrocosmic space shifting them from a known, native and loved system, to a new, unfamiliar and fearful one:

Chi, staccato a un tempo dalle più care abitudini, e disturbato nelle più care speranze, lascia que' monti, per avviarsi in traccia di sconosciuti che non ha mai desiderato di conoscere, e non può con l'immaginazione arrivare a un momento stabilito per il ritorno (p. 138).

Those who, swept away from their most cherished habits, frustrated in their dearest

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<sup>246</sup> Charles Weiss, *Homer's Odyssey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). Dante Alighieri, *La divina commedia* (Turin: Paravia, 1931). Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

hopes, have to leave the hills, to go and seek out unknown people whom they have never felt any desire to meet, without even being able to guess at a possible time for their return (p. 165).

Conversely to Dante and Virgil's allegorical crossing, which symbolises the beginning of the journey to the afterlife, here for Renzo, Lucia and Agnese the boat determines the initiation of their life among the living as individuals. If the souls on Charon's boat rebel against their fate 'Bestemmiavano Dio e lor parenti' ('God and their parents they blasphemes with scorn'),<sup>247</sup> Renzo, Lucia and Agnese unrebliously comply with what Padre Cristoforo suggests them to do.

Once they reach their destination, Renzo wishes to remunerate the boatman and the driver of the cart who carried them in the last part of their initial journey. Both of these men reject the money 'ritirò la mano quasi con ribrezzo, come se gli fosse proposto di rubare' (p. 140; 'withdrew his hand, with a horrified gesture, as if invited to take part in a robbery', p. 166), as they claim 'Siam quaggiù per aiutarci l'uno con l'altro' (p. 140; 'We are here to help each other', p. 166). If in *La Terre* all the members of both the micro- and the macrocosmic family system are self-referential and aim to overpower the other, my psychological interpretation of this passage suggests how the members of Lombardy's family system form with each other alliances and support mechanisms. As a result, we can infer – and we shall analyse it in detail later on – that Lombardy represents a functional macrocosmic family system, which allows its members to separate, and therefore it is able to establish clear structures and roles, as the boundaries are permeable. Interestingly, this reading also highlights a solidarity of class that appears in line with Manzoni's principles of Christian

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<sup>247</sup> Alighieri, *La divina commedia*, p. 30. Robert Torrance, *Dante's Inferno, a New Translation in Terza Rima* (Bloomington: Xlibris Corporation, 2011), p. 53.

compassion, which we shall analyse in the next chapter.<sup>248</sup> According to Ferruccio Ulivi, this scene appears to enhance the idea that for Manzoni, men should not expect to receive a compensation for their virtues in this world, but instead they should help each other through charity and benevolence in order to then be rewarded in the after-life.<sup>249</sup> In fact, on the driver of the cart the author writes ‘quello al pari del barcaiolo aveva in mira un’altra ricompensa, più lontana, ma più abbondante’ (p. 141; ‘But the driver, like the boatman, had a different reward in mind, of a less immediate and more abundant sort’, p. 167). As supported also by Stanley Chandler, Manzoni believed that life found its completion ‘in the next and our performance in this world, determines the nature of our life after physical death’.<sup>250</sup> Moreover, Renzo and Lucia’s journey, as we are about to discover, appears to be profoundly progressive. When they arrive in Monza, the betrothed must separate, as the plot requires each of them to begin a distinct process of growth: Renzo must go on to be hosted in a convent in Milan, while it has been arranged for Lucia to remain in Monza under the care of the nuns. Renzo’s travel, as Padre Cristoforo has claimed, will be a ‘prova’ (p. 135; ‘trial’, p. 161). In fact, the metaphorical child of the original family becomes a man through a series of adventures, obstacles, and decisions. Renzo’s journey, compared to Lucia’s, is more profound and cathartic. It is a pilgrimage, most probably due to the fact that he covers larger spaces and because he travels mostly on foot along the road, which (as we shall claim) intensifies internal changes. Gumbrecht has argued that since the seventeenth century, the road in European literature became representative of the world’s contingency which the protagonists must

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<sup>248</sup> See Manzoni’s Christianity in Chapter Three, section ‘Lombardy between Political Isolation and the National Project’.

<sup>249</sup> Ferruccio Ulivi, *Manzoni, storia e provvidenza* (Rome: Bonacci, 1974), p. 176.

<sup>250</sup> Stanley Bernard Chandler, ‘The Concept of Confinement in Manzoni’, *Italica*, 4 (1985), 285-293 (p. 287).

confront, in order to mould their subjectivity.<sup>251</sup> But Renzo's journey is also a pilgrimage because, contrarily to Lucia, he needs to clarify his position in relation to faith and the divine.

During his journey from Monza to Milan, and later from Milan to Bergamo the road that Renzo walks appears to reflect his internal feelings and thoughts, changing in parallel to his growth. Following Gumbrecht's idea, we can detect how the initial track of road Manzoni describes is 'tutta sepolta tra due alte rive, fangosa, sassosa, solcata da rotaie profonde, che, dopo una pioggia, divenivan rigagnoli' (p. 195; 'a sunken one with high banks; it was muddy, boulder strewn and cut up by deep ruts, which turned into rivulets whenever it rained', p. 224). The road is rough after a day of rain, in the same way that Renzo has a war of emotions after his 'rainy day', which is represented by Don Rodrigo's plan for Lucia and the betrothed's consequent impossibility of marriage.

In certe parti più basse, s'allagava tutta, che si sarebbe potuto andarci in barca. A que' passi, un piccol sentiero erto, a scalini, sulla riva, indicava che altri passeggiieri s'eran fatta una strada ne' campi' (p. 195).

At certain low-lying points the road became a lake, which would have been easier to cross in a boat. In such places a steep little path with steps showed where other travellers had found a way round through the fields (p. 224).

Once again the road is made up of different parts and slopes and reflects the contrasting feelings Renzo carries in his heart: 'in quel viaggio avrebbe ammazzato in cuor suo don Rodrigo, e risuscitatolo, almeno venti volte', comments the narrator (p. 195; 'in the course of his journey, he must have murdered Don Rodrigo in his thoughts and brought him to life

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<sup>251</sup> Gumbrecht, 'La strada', p. 480.

again at least twenty times', p. 224). I argue that there is almost a fusion between the protagonist and his surrounding environment, between his shifting moods and the different natural landscapes through which he passes. When Renzo finally arrives in Milan, we witness the first step in his process of individualisation, since the city represents a macrocosmic system on its own and is very distinct from the regional system from which Renzo hails. As demonstrated by Ezio Raimondi, Renzo's public adventure, namely his journey as an uprooted regional man among urban monsters, begins now.<sup>252</sup>

Renzo happens to reach Milan on the day of the bread riots. However, he does not truly understand what is taking place in the city as, seeing people carrying loads of stolen bread, he exclaims: 'Che sia il paese della cuccagna questo?' (p. 198; 'Is this the Land of Cockaigne?', p. 227). This idea of miscommunication and misunderstanding is central to Renzo's experience in Milan, in that it enhances a sort of incompatibility between the city's system and the regional one. Renzo is 'uno di campagna' (p. 200; 'from the country', p. 230) – as he tells the capuchin friar when he reaches the convent. Fearful of the riots, the friar sends Renzo away, curtly dismissing him: 'In convento, per adesso, non s'entra' (p. 200; 'We're not letting anyone into the monastery at the present', p. 230). The alienation of a country-dweller seeing the big city for the first time is heightened further by the present situation of Milan in a state of upheaval, as a kind of topsy-turvy world where not even the church is able to uphold its own values of acceptance and solidarity. According to Luigi Ferri, 'Milano vive una vita a sé, con la funzione di luogo altro, diverso' ('Milan lives a life on its own, with the function of representing a different place, the other').<sup>253</sup> Additionally, the city represents the unfamiliar world that Renzo needs to acknowledge in order to establish his

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<sup>252</sup> Raimondi, '*I promessi sposi* e la ricerca della giustizia', p. 7.

<sup>253</sup> Luigi Ferri, 'Problemi di geografia nei capitoli XVI e XVII de *I promessi sposi*', *Italica*, 84 (2007), 199-213 (p. 202).

identity.

This concept is supported further if we take into consideration Georg Simmel's later sociological theories about the unsuitability of a regional man in an urban centre. Simmel not only described, but also illustrated the reasons why, in a large city, the individuals' behaviours and their relationship are so specific and differentiated from those taking place in the countryside or in smaller towns.<sup>254</sup> In the city, individuals are always undergoing numerous 'stimuli' and the pivot of their relations becomes economic and quantitative, no longer personal and emotional. The city man 'reacts with his head instead of his heart', and so rationality becomes the characterising element of the individual. In order to cope with the city's immeasurable number of incitements, the metropolitan man develops 'intellect', in which case he is very different from the rural man of the countryside whose 'rhythm of life and sensory and mental imagery flows more slowly, more habitually, and more evenly'.<sup>255</sup> The rural man in the city lacks this kind of intellect, so he is overwhelmed by the metropolitan stimuli and is no longer able to react accordingly. Renzo analogously, arrives in Milan as an ingenuous regional young man, and has to learn how to react to those 'stimuli' present in the unfamiliar city and develop his 'intellect'.

The miscommunication caused by the conflict between city and region, and Renzo's regional incompatibility with the urban environment, almost costs him his freedom. First, during the riots the 'folla' (crowd) suspects him of being a spy of the Commissioner of Supply, the man believed to be responsible for Milan's famine. Seeing the angry mob forcing its way into the Commissioner's house, as the moral, god-fearing man he is, Renzo tries to stop the violence: 'Vogliamo noi rubare il mestiere al boia?', he harangues, 'Assassinare un

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<sup>254</sup> Georg Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, ed. by Kurt H. Wolff (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1950), p. 409.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 410.



Cristiano?’ (p. 219; ‘For shame! Do we want to do the hangman out of a job? Do we want to kill a fellow Christian?’, p. 250). His well-meaning intervention is ill-received by the riotous crowd, who turn savagely against him: ‘Ah traditor della patria’, they call him (p. 219; ‘You traitor to your country’, p. 250), following which Renzo has to run for his life. Consequently, because of his naivety, typical of a regional man, Renzo is rejected and persecuted in the city. The idea that the city, a separate system within the region, pushes him to leave is expressed further in the episode at the Full Moon Inn. Injudiciously, the young man accepts wine from a stranger and while becoming more and more inebriated he tells him he has taken a few loaves of bread and exaggerates his role in ‘saving’ the Commissioner from mob violence. The stranger, who is in reality a police informer, takes Renzo for one of the leaders of the revolt:

Sappiamo benissimo che colui ha portato una quantità di pane rubato, e rubato con violenza, per via di saccheggio e sedizione (p. 253).

We know very well that the criminal brought a quantity of stolen bread into your inn – bread acquired by robbery with violence, breaking and entering and seditious conduct (p. 287).

The innkeeper then reports Renzo to the police, who seize him with a view to take him to jail. However, as they walk through Piazza del Duomo, Renzo exploits the confusion of the continuing riots to gain the help of the insurgents: ‘Aiutatemi, non m’abbandonate, figliuoli!’ (p. 262; ‘Help me! Don’t desert me, brothers!’), p. 297). The crowd rises up and helps Renzo escape. Therefore, in the short time since his arrival the previous day, Renzo has gained enough experience of the urban world and crowd dynamics to be able to exploit their moods and their strength to his own advantage, instead of falling prey to them. Here, he actively

plays the part he has been given (that of the convicted agitator), instead of trying to establish the truth and expressing his real character. The city is thus represented as a corrupted, violent social system from which he is glad to escape.

Renzo re-enters the regional space as he starts again his journey on foot, and because he cannot go back home or stay in Milan as Padre Cristoforo told him, he decides ‘per suo rifugio quel paese nel territorio di Bergamo, dov’era accasato quel suo cugino Bortolo [...] Ma trovar la strada, lì stave il male’ (p. 263; ‘to take refuge in the territory of Bergamo, in the village where his cousin Bortolo had settled [...] the difficulty was to find out how to get there’, p. 299). During Renzo’s journey from Milan to Bergamo we are able to detect a first change in the development of his self-consciousness and individualisation. The riots in Milan led him to understand that he is no longer in his native microcosm and that he must check his tongue and his drinking. As Renzo thinks back to the events of the previous night, the narrator comments ‘quel vino gli era venuto in odio’ (p. 268; ‘feeling a positive hatred for that wine’, p. 304). The road he walks once again mirrors his inner feelings ‘cammina, cammina; trova cascine, trova villaggi, tira innanzi senza domandarne il nome’ (p. 266; ‘he went on and on, past farms and through villages without even asking what they were called’, p. 302), and just like the road he is walking is unclear and unknown to Renzo, his emotions express a sense of loss and a succession of fears, anger and repentance for his actions.

His plan is to reach the river Adda, as he knows that it marks the border between the Milanese State and the Venetian Republic, to which, at the time, Bergamo belonged. Contrarily to how he acted in Milan, he is now smarter and able to shield himself from people’s enquiries. When he reaches a tavern in the countryside, the other guests ask him about the riots in Milan, but he craftily responds ‘Vengo da Liscate [...] io non ho sentito nulla’ (p. 270; ‘I’ve come from Liscate [...] but I didn’t hear anything about it myself’, p. 307). Renzo’s process of independence and individualisation reaches its climax in the passage

dedicated to his reunion with the river Adda. Having left the tavern, he walks without knowing the way and all the fears he has felt in Milan come back to him: ‘il povero Renzo aveva due guerre in corpo: la voglia di correre, e quella di stare nascosto’ (p. 279; ‘as we know, Renzo had had two such desires together in his heart for many hours – the desire to make haste and the desire to remain unnoticed’, p. 316) His fears and anxieties resemble those of an adolescent on the verge of choosing between maturity and the original desire to remain a child.

His pilgrimage towards the river, as interpreted by Giovanni Getto, represents not only a journey through a different natural realm, but also the alternating of different emotional states. Renzo is suffering from solitude and from terror that he might find himself lost in an unknown, hostile world, and he oscillates between anxiety about social solitude, determined by his condition as a fugitive, and the torments of an isolation produced by his location in a desolate, estranged and mysterious nature.<sup>256</sup> We hear traces of the fairy-tale in this passage describing how, after night has fallen, the landscape so dear to Renzo becomes dreadful:

Gli alberi che vedeva in lontananza, gli rappresentavano figure strane, deformi, mostruose; l’annoiava l’ombra delle cime leggermente agitate, che tremolavano al sentiero illuminato qua e là della luna (p. 282).

The trees in the distance took on strange, distorted, monstrous shapes. Shifting shadows, cast on the moonlit stretches of the path by the gently waving upper branches of the trees, disturbed him greatly (p. 319).

However, he does not lose heart and carries on when he finally hears the sound of the Adda’s

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<sup>256</sup> Getto, ‘La redenzione di Renzo’, p. 269.

waters: “‘É l’Adda!’ fu il ritrovamento d’un amico, d’un fratello, d’un salvatore’ (p. 283; “‘It’s the Adda!’ It was like greeting an old friend, a brother, a rescuer’, p. 320). Finding the river could be interpreted as his salvation. He immediately recognises the familiar sound of the river flowing, as this ‘old friend’ runs through Renzo’s own village, having its sources in the Alpine range above. The natural elements here are personified into well-loved, dear familial figures (the river is ‘a brother’). Regional space here does not function as an enmeshed family system that hinders its members’ individualisation and growth; instead, it facilitates Renzo’s escape and allows him to cross the border, both symbolically and actually, between the state of Milan, where the betrothed have suffered injustice and persecution, and Venice, the republican land of freedom. This boundary crossing underlines the concept that the journey across the region provides Renzo with the tools to adapt to changes and acquire autonomy, but also through the negative experiences he has gone through in the city.

Consequently, the regional family system seems to lead Renzo to the Adda as a reward for having endured the obstacles he has encountered on the road up until now. Paraphrasing Sergio Degradi, the river marks a border that spatially separates the two Renzos, i.e. the ingenuous and confused one arriving in Milan, and the more aware and confident one escaping from the city.<sup>257</sup> Up until this moment, Renzo is depicted as an impulsive and idealistic young man, because he is convinced that even humble people like him can influence ‘i potenti’ (the powerful ones’) decision, therefore modifying the course of history. As seen above, the incidents in Milan prove him wrong, and on the Adda’s shore he finally understands that the only justice he can hope for one day is the divine one. As we shall examine in more detail in the following chapter, this moment of spiritual redemption marks for Renzo the passage from adolescence to adulthood. This passage is not a biological one, as

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<sup>257</sup> Sergio Degradi, ‘Il bildungsroman di Renzo: una nota su *I promessi sposi*’, *Italianistica: rivista di letteratura italiana*, 28 (1999), 421-425 (p. 424).

Renzo we must remember is already an adult, but it is a maturation in psychological terms leading him to elaborate and improve a number of behaviours typical of adolescence which he has been showing up until now. I refer to the infantile, impulsive and slightly omnipotent approach that Renzo discloses when he tries to trick Don Abbondio into celebrating the wedding in the night of 'intrigue and subterfuge' (p. 161); as well as the rebellious trait and unawareness of his action's consequences that Renzo parades when he takes part in the bread riots in Milan, when he becomes drunk at the Inn and ends up in prison. At the Adda shores instead, Renzo appears more autonomous and conscious of his actions, therefore becoming adult in psychodynamic terms. This is visible in the section where, before falling asleep, he says his prayers, asking forgiveness for not having said them the night before: 'Per questo, m'è toccata, la mattina, quella bella svegliata' (p. 284; 'That's what earned me the kind of awakening I had this morning!', p. 322). In his own simple, unaffected way, Renzo shows he has gained a higher level of self-consciousness as he interprets what befell him in terms of his own actions and choices, thus focusing on those elements of reality he can actually control, without fatalism and without blaming others.

When he wakes up in the morning he carries on travelling both physically and allegorically along his path of individualisation. Now, however, Renzo is a changed man, and he must actually board another boat to cross the river. Unlike the beginning, when Padre Cristoforo arranged for the boat for the three of them, this time it is Renzo himself who contracts with the boatman. This passage highlights how he has abandoned his position as a child in the system's structure and has upgraded to a more autonomous role: 'Mi fareste il servizio, col pagare, di traghettarmi di là' (p. 287; 'Please take me over the other side; I'll pay you, of course', p. 324). In addition, in opposition to the beginning of the novel where he sat silently in the boat, Renzo now takes up the paddle and aids the boatman 'Renzo, vedendo sul fondo della barca un altro remo, si china, e l'afferra' (p. 287; 'Renzo noticed another oar lying

in the bottom of the boat and bent down to pick it up', p. 325). It is clear how the young man has now entered the adult dimension because this time he pays the boatman 'mette le mani in tasca, tira fuori una berlinga, che, attese le circostanze, non fu un piccolo sproposito, e la porge al galantuomo' (p. 288; 'he put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a *berlinga*, which was quite a sum of money to part with in the circumstances, and held it out to the good fellow', p. 325). Renzo has left behind the protected dimension of his native village where everybody would help one another in exchange for nothing, to enter a larger, alien world. Once he reaches the shore, his journey across the countryside of Bergamo displays the marks of poverty and famine:

Per tutta la strada, e più ancora nelle terre e ne' borghi, incontrava a ogni passo poveri, che non eran poveri di mestiere, e mostravan la miseria più nel viso che nel vestiario: contadini, montanari, artigiani, famiglie intere; e un ronzio di preghiere, di lamenti e di vagiti (p. 289).

All along the road, and still more in the villages and hamlets, there were people begging who were clearly not beggars by profession. Their destitution showed more in their faces than in their dress; there were peasants, hillmen, artisans, whole families, in a constant, low chorus of appeals, complaints and whimpering (p. 327).

At the beginning of the novel Renzo has a flourishing little lot of land under cultivation, his 'poderetto' (p. 26), which he religiously tends. When he arrives in Bergamo as an immigrant, owning nothing but his ability to work, he witnesses this spectacle of misery with great concern: 'Chi sa se c'è lavoro, come negli anni passati?' (p. 289; 'Is there plenty of work here, like there used to be in years gone by?', p. 327). According to Guido Baldi, Renzo's

separation from the familiar and his entrance into a vast and disturbing new world determine the beginning of the exploration of reality's negativity in all of its most extreme forms.<sup>258</sup> It is Baldi's opinion that Renzo must exit the protected environment of his familiar village in order to nurture a more correct and adequate vision of events, shaking off himself that innocence which translates into inexperience of the laws governing the real world. Baldi's statement in this context seems to enhance the idea of Renzo's growth after the Adda night that I presented earlier on. In fact, after having departed from his domestic 'nest' and after having lived through the turbulences in Milan, Renzo upon reaching Bergamo appears able to comprehend better that reality is also made of sufferings and woes. His reaction to this new awareness is, in accordance with Manzoni's vision, imbued with Christian values. In fact, when he sees a family begging in the street, without hesitation he hands over the little money he had saved up: 'e cacciata subito la mano in tasca, la votò di quei pochi soldi; li mise nella mano che si trovò più vicina, e riprese la sua strada' (p. 290; 'putting his hand in his pocket, he took out the few coins that remained in it, pressed them into the nearest hand, and walked on', p. 328). Paraphrasing Ezio Raimondi in fact, and we shall see this in more detail in Chapter Three, for Manzoni only benevolence can save men from despair. Renzo amongst the horrors of the famine and of his own poverty does not hesitate to help the begging family, and for this act of charity he seems to be rewarded as he finds his cousin who in turn will help him.<sup>259</sup>

During Renzo's stay in Bergamo we are able to establish another difference in the microcosmic family system. If in *La Terre* and in *The Return of the Native* we witnessed how family members were fundamentally disinterested in one another, if not antagonistic, always concerned about how to accumulate more money, in *I promessi sposi*, this is not the case. For instance, when Renzo finally meets his cousin, they embrace one another with happiness: 'un

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<sup>258</sup> Guido Baldi, *I promessi sposi: progetto di società e mito* (Milan: Mursia, 1985), p. 130.

<sup>259</sup> Ezio Raimondi, *Il romanzo senza idillio* (Turin: Einaudi, 1974), p. 183.

oh! Di sorpresa, un alzar di braccia, un gettarsele al collo scambievolmente' (p. 291; 'there was a cry of surprise, and then Bortolo held out his arms to him and the cousins embraced each other warmly', p. 329). Relationships between members of this family system are neither disengaged nor enmeshed. In addition, there is no obsession with money in this family system as when Renzo tells his cousin he does not have any funds, Bortolo responds 'Non importa, n'ho io: e non ci pensare, che, presto presto, cambiandosi le cose, se Dio vorrà, me li renderai, e te n'avanzerà anche per te' (p. 292; 'It doesn't matter, I've got some. Don't worry about making use of it; for if God wills it won't be long before things change, and you'll pay me back and have plenty over for yourself', p. 330).

From this moment, Renzo's journey pauses, as he takes on work in the cotton mill with Bortolo under the false name of Antonio Rivolta. Here, Renzo contracts the plague but is spared 'in pochi giorni si trovò fuori pericolo' (p. 548; 'and in a few days he was out of danger', p. 613). The plague epidemic is another important allegorical step in Renzo's journey. Once he recovers, he sounds positively self-confident and assertive, and sets forth in search of Lucia, in order to finally establish his new microcosmic family system: 'Trovarla, la troverò io; [...] e la condurrò via con me, lei e quella povera Agnese, se è viva!' (p. 548; 'I'll find her alright. Then I'll bring her away with me, and her poor mother too, if she's alive', p. 614). Renzo is off on foot, his only mode of transportation, towards his native village. Once he arrives, the place appears changed, reflecting the change we see in Renzo; instead of friendly voices, he finds 'un silenzio di morte' (p. 551; 'deathly hush', p. 616). The village seems to parallel Renzo's internal alteration. Just like the young man has experienced wrongs and injustices and has now abandoned the naïveté with which he had set off on his journey, the village has altered and is now crushed by famine, plague and the Landsknechts' invasion (mercenary troops fighting on behalf of the German Emperor). Renzo's final separation from his native land takes place when he reaches his vineyard and finds it desolated and ruined as



people, in his absence, have taken advantage of it: ‘viti, gelsi, frutti d’ogni sorte, tutto era stato strappato alla peggio, o tagliato al piede’ (p. 555; ‘vines, mulberries, fruit trees of every kind, had been roughly torn down, or cut to the root’, p. 621). However, he ‘non si curava d’entrare in una tal vigna; e forse non istette tanto a guardarla, quanto noi a farne questo pò di schizzo’ (p. 556; ‘had no wish to enter such a place. He probably spent less time on looking at it than we have taken over its description’, p. 622). Renzo, who is now grown, understands that he no longer belongs to his native nest. Paolo Scarpi, in referring to this idea, observes that ‘l’uomo che viaggia non ritorna per ritrovarsi nella stessa condizione di partenza’ (‘a traveller never returns to find the same situation he left when he departed’).<sup>260</sup> Without thinking twice about his old home, Renzo in fact immediately starts again his journey to Milan where he knows Lucia resides.

The narrator tells us that this second travel to Milan ‘fu senza accidenti e senza nulla che potesse distrar Renzo da’ suoi pensieri’ (p. 559; ‘was uneventful, with nothing to distract Renzo from his own thoughts’, p. 626), thus enhancing the idea that the young man has now separated and developed into an adult who knows his way around and reaches his destination without metaphorically or physically straying from his path – as he did the first time he went to the city. However, once again in Milan, Manzoni represents the discordance between regional man and urban system. Just like when the capuchin does not let Renzo into the convent, during his second stay in Milan, Renzo asks a lady if she has any information about Lucia: ‘Ci sta qui a servire una giovine di campagna, che ha nome Lucia?’ (p. 575; ‘Is there a young woman from the country in service here, by the name of Lucia?’, p. 642). The woman talks to Renzo from a window, because the plague has spread in Milan, killing the majority of the population and she fears contagion. To Renzo’s question the woman responds quickly ‘La

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<sup>260</sup> Paolo Scarpi, *La fuga e il ritorno, storia e mitologia del viaggio* (Venice: Marsilio, 1992), p. 10.

non c'è più; al Lazzaretto, andate' (p. 575; 'She's not here any longer. In the Lazaretto. Be off with you!', p. 642), and before he can reply, she shuts the window and is seen no more. The outbreak of the plague has severed even further the already weak pattern of relations of the disengaged urban society. Further proof of this is that, in the paranoid atmosphere of the plague-stricken city, Renzo is mistaken for an 'untore', an anointer, someone suspected of spreading the plague by applying infected ointment to people or things. Seeing Renzo, a suspicious stranger, knocking at the woman's door, a passer-by starts shouting: 'L'untore! Dàgli! Dàgli! Dàgli all'untore!' (p. 576; 'Anointers! Get him! Get him! Get the anointer!', p. 643). Once again, Renzo risks lynching from an angry mob, but instead of trying to reason with them, as he would have done at the beginning of the journey, he looks for a quick escape. The 'monatti', public officers in charge of removing the bodies of plague victims, appear with their cart laden with corpses.

Shunned by everyone as pariahs and bogeymen, the monatti welcome Renzo into their midst. If on the one hand the monatti's cart symbolises death, on the other hand, for Renzo, it represents the key device for his survival, and he gives them his most heartfelt thanks: 'Certo, posso dire che vi devo la vita, e vi ringrazio con tutto il cuore' (p. 578; 'There's no doubt about it, I owe you my life. I thank you with all my heart', p. 646). In fact, the monatti are as much as outsiders of the system as Renzo. In fact, their social occupation was created specifically during the plague's contagion 'bisognava ogni giorno sostituire, ogni giorno aumentare serventi pubblici di varie specie' (p. 530; 'every day replacements and reinforcement had to be found for public servants of various kinds', p. 592). They represent an extraordinary group in the literal sense, as they are out of the ordinary, and so they do not seem to belong to the urban macrocosm in which they operate and are in fact, just like Renzo, repudiated and isolated by it. One of them tells Renzo: 'Per ricompensa della vita che facciamo, ci maledicono, e vanno dicendo che, finita la moria, ci voglion fare impiccar tutti'

(p. 578; ‘Why, do you know what reward they want to give us for doing this dirty job? They curse us, and say that when the plague’s over they’re going to string us all up’, p. 646). This is probably the reason why in Milan the only group that does not seem to antagonise Renzo, is that of the *monatti*. Absurdly, to an extent they all belong to the same microcosm in the city, namely that of the outsiders, and therefore they help each other.

When Renzo finally reaches the Lazzaretto, he starts to piece together his original family, finding along the way the various members that composed it at the beginning of the journey. The first member he meets is Padre Cristoforo, and thanks to him, Renzo undergoes the last change in his process of individualisation. Renzo reveals to him his thoughts of revenge against Don Rodrigo:

Lo troverò quel furfante che ci ha separati; quel birbone che, se non fosse stato lui, Lucia sarebbe stata mia, [...] è venuto un tempo che gli uomini s’incontrino a viso a viso: e [...] la farò io giustizia! (p. 591).

I’ll find that swine who separated us; for if it wasn’t for him Lucia would have been my wife (...) it’s time now for men to meet each other face to face ... and then justice’ll be done – by me! (p. 660).

Anger and revenge, as we witness in both *La Terre* and *The Return of the Native*, determine the pathological characteristics of the family systems we encountered, and of their members. Contrary to the previously analysed novels, however, Padre Cristoforo, the authority figure of the betrothed’s original family, uses his role to provide Renzo with the tools to overcome his anger, consequently not straying from his functional individualisation. The Padre states:

Sciagurato! Tu sai, tu l'hai detto tante volte, ch'Egli può fermar la mano d'un potente; ma sappi che può anche fermar quella d' un vendicativo. E perchè sei povero, perchè sei offeso, credi ch'Egli non possa difendere contro di te un uomo che ha creato a sua immagine? [...]No! ma tu sai cosa puoi fare? Puoi odiare, e perderti; puoi, con un tuo sentimento, allontanar da te ogni benedizione (p. 593).

Miserable sinner! [...] you know that God can hold back the hand of a bully, and you've said so yourself many a time; but remember that he can also hold back the hand of an avenger. And because you're a poor man, and because you've been wronged, do you think that God cannot protect a man – a man whom he has made in his own image – against your vengeance? [...] Never! But do you know what you can do? You can hate your neighbour and lose your own soul (p. 662).

From this passage we can postulate how, contrary to the other novels, in *I promessi sposi* it is not the regional macrocosmic system that detains authority, but God. His divine providence is what represents in this novel the authority to which every character seems to be subjected to. Similarly to Eustacia, with his claim Renzo seems to rebel against this supreme authority. Padre Cristoforo, therefore, using his role of fatherly figure, helps Renzo to understand his 'rebelliousness' and puts him back in his place. The friar leads Renzo to Don Rodrigo's death bed, and the sight of the once powerful man lying there unconscious cures Renzo of his revengeful thoughts: 'Capisco che non gli avevo mai perdonato davvero; capisco che ho parlato da bestia, e non da cristiano: e ora, con la grazia del Signore, sì, gli perdono proprio di cuore' (p. 593; 'I see now that I really hadn't forgiven him at all; I see I've been talking like a brute beast and not like a Christian; but now, with the grace of God, I do forgive him. I forgive him with all my heart', p. 662).

Only after he has accepted his role in the macrocosmic family system subjected to the divine providence, is Renzo allowed to see Lucia again. She has just healed from the plague, and Renzo can scarcely believe his luck at being able to reunite with her: ‘Lucia! V’ho trovata! Vi trovo! Siete proprio voi! Siete viva!’ (p. 601; ‘Lucia! So I’ve found you at last! So you’re here! It’s really you! You’re alive!’, p. 671), but their new family is not yet complete. After this reunion, Renzo starts another journey to Pasturo, to find Agnese. He walks without complaint through the pouring rain, which metaphorically cleanses the world of the disease: ‘Renzo n’usciva come poteva, senz’atti di impazienza, senza parolacce, senza pentimenti’ (p. 617; ‘Renzo got on as best he could, without an oath, without an impatient gesture, without regretting his decision to continue his journey’, p. 688). In fact, according to Stanley Bernard Chandler now that Renzo has forgiven Don Rodrigo and found Lucia, ‘his journey becomes purely physical because his spiritual progress is complete’.<sup>261</sup> Once he arrives in Pasturo, he finds Agnese safe in a little isolated house, and just like the Milanese woman, Agnese talks to Renzo from a window, though she does not shut him out. Renzo has found the final member of his family and informs her of his plan to move her and Lucia to Bergamo’s territory where they can start a new life.

In conclusion, we could infer, based on the report of Raimondi and Evans Lansing Smith, that Renzo’s journey embodies a true regional odyssey, as it resembles that of Odysseus travelling from Calypso’s island to his hometown in Ithaca.<sup>262</sup> The two journeys share the same themes. First of all, we find the theme of the escape. Odysseus must abandon

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<sup>261</sup> Stanley Bernard Chandler, ‘The Significance of Journey in Manzoni’, in *The Motif of the Journey in Nineteenth-Century Italian Literature*, ed. by Bruno Magliocchetti and Anthony Verna (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994), pp. 94-106 (p. 102).

<sup>262</sup> Raimondi, *Il romanzo senza idillio*, p. 173. Evans Lansing Smith, *The Hero’s Journey in Literature, Parables of Poesis* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1997), p. 29.

Calypso's island to begin his travels homewards; similarly, Renzo is in a way forced to abandon his village in order to find a new home. We witness then the theme of transfiguration/loss of identity whereby Odysseus, when he reaches Circe, forgets for a period of time that he must carry on with his journey; just like him, when Renzo is in Milan, he is caught up in the bread revolts and shifts his focus of attention from being reunited with Lucia, to political matters. We then find the themes of peace, reflection and hopefulness when Odysseus reaches the Phaeacians, where he narrates his story and recharges before continuing his journey; Renzo arrives at the territory of Bergamo, in order to save money to go and find Lucia in Milan. Finally, we have the theme of reunion, in that Odysseus returns to Ithaca but before he can be reunited with Penelope he must beat the Proci. Similarly, before becoming Lucia's husband, Renzo is mistaken in Milan for an anointer, he must forgive Don Rodrigo, Padre Cristoforo must release the young woman from her vow, and only after they have returned home can they finally marry. Through his travels, Odysseus affirms his autonomy against any human or divine design that might hinder his freedom and desire for knowledge. Similarly, the journey that is imposed on Renzo at the beginning becomes the key tool in how the protagonist gains self-knowledge and reacquires his identity.

While Renzo's journey embodies a true regional odyssey, Lucia's itinerary in the novel appears to be less complex. In a way, she has less to 'travel', especially from a psychological point of view, because she already knows her subjected place in relation to God and her family system. Her adventures consist more of tests that confirm her resilience and moral strength. Paraphrasing Enzo Girardi, Lucia does not need to alter, because she appears perfect within her limits, and because Manzoni created her as a character that mainly inspires the change in others. In fact, as we shall see later in the chapter, Lucia is able to induce change also in characters such as the *bravo* Il Nibbio and the evil warlord called The

Unnamed.<sup>263</sup> She is the reason why Renzo, when scheming in his mind to murder Don Rodrigo, stops and remembers ‘E Lucia?’, the author adds, ‘Appena questa parola si fu gettata a traverse di quelle bieche fantasie, i migliori pensieri a cui era avvezza la mente di Renzo, v’entrarono in folla’ (p. 35; ‘And what would happen to Lucia then? As soon as her face appeared among these dismal visions, the better thoughts which normally occupied Renzo’s mind flocked home again’, p. 55). In addition, contrary to Renzo who we witnessed walking to reach his destinations, Lucia is carried mainly from one place to another, and her feet seem to touch the ground rarely, in conformity to gender stereotypes and symbolising her more passive, suffering role. Nonetheless, this lack of change in Lucia should not deceive us, as hers is as much a journey as Renzo’s in the sense of psychological growth and the adversities that she faces will lead her to acquire experiences of the world and to complete her process of maturity enabling her to cover the role of wife and mother in her new family system. We could argue that Lucia seems to an extent to be already detached and in a way separated from her original family. In fact when Renzo tells her about Don Rodrigo, her first words are ‘Andiamo tanto lontano, che colui non senta più parlar di noi’ (p. 41; ‘Let’s go away, so far away that Don Rodrigo will never hear of us again’, p. 61). As such, Lucia, in order to protect her family system and future spousal subsystem, appears to be ready to abandon the native village to settle in a new macrocosm.

While Renzo’s adventures unfold in Milan, Lucia and her mother remain in the convent in Monza. However, Don Rodrigo organises a plot to kidnap Lucia from the convent and to take her to the castle of a feared warlord whose name Manzoni withholds and who

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<sup>263</sup> Enzo Girardi, *Manzoni Reazionario* (Rocca San Casciano: Cappelli, 1996), p. 50. On Lucia see also Enrico Elli, ‘Di Lucia e della giustizia’, in *Questo matrimonio non s’ha da fare: lettura dei ‘Promessi sposi’*, ed. by Paola Fandella, Giuseppe Langella and Pierantonio Frare (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2005), pp. 9-14 (p. 10).

hence is called *l'Innominato*, the Unnamed. Lucia is seized in the street and bundled up in a carriage. The carriage she is in symbolises a confined and oppressive place; it is covered and drives around through the woods in order not to be spotted 'intanto la carrozza, andando sempre di corsa s'era inoltrata nel bosco' (p. 334; 'meanwhile the carriage, still at the gallop, had travelled well into the wood', p. 376), which underlines the secrecy of the act. Lucia at first rebels against her captivity: 'si storceva, ma era tenuta da tutte le parti: raccoglieva tutte le sue forze, e dava delle stratte, per buttarsi verso lo sportello' (p. 333; 'she twisted and turned but she was held tightly on all sides; she gathered all her strength and tugged away towards the door', p. 375). However, seeing that fighting is useless, she immediately finds solace in her faith and prays:

Lucia si rivolse a Colui che tiene in mano il cuore degli uomini, e può, quando voglia, intenerire i più duri. [...] mise le braccia in croce sul petto, e pregò qualche tempo con la mente; poi tirata fuori la corona, cominciò a dire il Rosario (p. 336).

Lucia turned her thoughts to the Power that holds the hearts of men in its hand, and can soften even the hardest of them when it will. [...] she crossed her arms over her breast, and prayed silently for a while. Then she got out her rosary, and began to tell her beads (p. 378).

If Renzo during his journey ponders murderous thoughts against Don Rodrigo, Lucia already knows that she must endure whatever God's providence lays on her path. She recognises in God the only true authority of her macrocosmic system and puts herself in his hands. In fact, when she asks her kidnappers where they are taking her she begs them: 'Che mi portino in qualche chiesa' (p. 340; 'Leave me near a church', a phrase left untranslated by Bruce



Penman), the only place where she can feel truly safe. Lucia's religiousness plays a key role in her liberation, as it has a strong impact on both the kidnappers, as the Nibbio tells the Unnamed 'M'ha fatto troppa compassione' (p. 341; 'Somehow, she made me feel sorry for her. Compassion, I suppose you'd call it', p. 383) and on the Unnamed himself. This is a man who has led a life replete in sins, murders and criminal acts, and who has promised Don Rodrigo to bring him Lucia. However, when the Unnamed meets her, she kneels down to him with hands clasped and tells him, 'Pregherò sempre io il Signore che la preserve da ogni male' (p. 344; 'I'll always pray the Lord to preserve you from evil', p. 386). Lucia's faithfulness moves the Unnamed, who decides to free her the following day and not take her to Don Rodrigo. As Guido Baldi has argued, Lucia embodies the Christian and domestic virtue model and, from a functional point of view, has the task of stimulating a cathartic and moderating effect on the characters she encounters.<sup>264</sup>

The night before her liberation, Lucia prays to God for help and believes that 'la sua orazione sarebbe stata più accetta e più certamente esaudita quando facesse qualche offerta' (p. 348; 'her prayers would be more likely to find acceptance and be answered [...] if they were accompanied by a sacrifice of some kind', p. 390). Therefore, she promises the Virgin Mary to be faithful to her for the rest of her life, thereby renouncing Renzo forever. Lucia's vow represents an obstacle to the creation of a new family system that the narrative will have to overcome. Touched by Lucia's faith, the Unnamed undergoes a spiritual conversion and, the next day, goes to the cardinal Federigo Borromeo, Milan's archbishop, to confess his sins and to ask for his help to bring Lucia to her mother. The cardinal provides for her with a 'lettiga portata da due mule' (p. 379; 'the litter carried by two mules', p. 426), which offers a stark contrast to the carriage with horses that was used to kidnap her earlier on. It is interesting to note how throughout the novel the author seems to juxtapose the majestic and

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<sup>264</sup> Baldi, *I promessi sposi*, p. 126.

noble horse only to the powerful, proud and evil antagonists such as Don Rodrigo and his bravi ‘una mattina, Don Rodrigo uscì a cavallo, il Griso alla staffa’ (p. 324; ‘one morning, Don Rodrigo rode out, Griso at his side’, p. 365), and the Unnamed and his bravo Nibbio ‘[l’Innominato] chiamò il Nibbio e con aria risoluta, gli comandò che montasse subito a cavallo’ (p. 330; ‘[the Unnamed] sent for Nibbio and with a determined air he ordered him to take a horse at once’, p. 371). In the scene with Federigo Borromeo, however, the use of the mule, an animal known for his docility and deference, and used (we imagine) mainly by peasants in their everyday work in the countryside, becomes for the Unnamed the appropriate device to carry out a task of great humility and catharsis, namely liberating Lucia. Actually, the Unnamed, after meeting the young woman, renounces his life of sins to find his own role in God’s macrocosm. He does so by abandoning the power of the superb horse and pledging instead his troth to the humbler and more acquiescent mule. In opposition to the carriage in which Lucia was abducted, this litter symbolises freedom as it carries the young woman from her prison, the Unnamed’s castle, to her salvation.

At the end of this journey, Lucia meets her mother and they are immediately ‘nelle braccia l’una dell’altra’ (p. 398; ‘in each other’s arms’, p. 447). Similarly to Renzo’s encounter with Bortolo, Lucia embraces her mother and demonstrates her affection. Although her individualisation process is not as detailed as we see for Renzo, we can find another example of it when Agnese, after having heard of her daughter’s misadventures, states against Don Rodrigo ‘Ma verrà la sua ora anche per lui. Domeneddio lo pagherà secondo il merito’ (p. 399; ‘But his day of reckoning will come! God will pay him as he has deserved’, p. 448). Lucia, who has now directly experienced suffering and pain, contradicts her mother: ‘No, no, mamma, no! Non gli augurate di patire, non l’augurate a nessuno! Se sapeste cosa sia patire! Se aveste provato!’ (p. 399; ‘No, no, mother, no! Don’t wish him to suffer like that! Don’t wish it for anybody! If only you knew what it’s like! If only you’d felt it yourself!’, p. 448). If

before her adventures Lucia knew about sufferings only in the abstract, she has now experienced them in the flesh, and this determines her process of growth and individualisation. As we shall see in more detail in Chapter Three, it is Manzoni's intention to exemplify, in the character of Lucia, the Christian attitude of turning to one's faith in moments of hardship, rather than rebel (as the people of Milan do) or seek revenge against an enemy. The young woman's function in the novel is clear in this passage as well. If on the one hand the Unnamed 'is in effect redeemed by Lucia', she now also teaches her mother to be a good Christian and remain in her place without rebelling, similarly to how Padre Cristoforo instructed Renzo to forgive Don Rodrigo earlier on.<sup>265</sup> The Cardinal Borromeo tells her 'Dio ha permesso che foste messa a una gran prova; ma v'ha anche fatto vedere che non aveva levato l'occhio da voi, che non v'aveva dimenticato' (p. 401; 'God has allowed you to be sorely tried; but he has also shown you clearly that his eyes have never left you, that he has never forgotten you', p. 451). Unlike the macrocosmic family system of La Beauce and, to a certain extent, that of Egdon Heath, Manzoni's world is presided over by God, and the true authority placed at the summit of the macrocosmic hierarchy is neither the land nor nature, but divine providence.

Lucia's journey continues with a second separation from her mother, as she must go to Milan under the protection of Donna Prassede, a charitable noblewoman who takes an interest in the young woman's case, while Agnese must go back to the village. The parting between mother and daughter appears very difficult because it renews the previous trauma of separation:

Lucia si staccò dalla madre, potete pensar con che pianti; disse per la seconda volta

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<sup>265</sup> Richard Lansing, 'Stylistic and Structural Duality in Manzoni's *I promessi sposi*', *Italica*, 53 (1976), 347-361 (p. 356).

addio al paese, con quel senso di doppia amarezza, che si prova lasciando un luogo che fu unicamente caro, e che non può più esserlo (p. 431).

Lucia tore herself away from her mother, with many tears, and left the cottage. She bade her village farewell for the second time, with that double feeling of sadness with which we leave a spot that has had a special place in our hearts, which it can now never have again (p. 483).

Furthermore, this second time, Lucia parts from her mother of her own volition, to avoid being recognised in Don Rodrigo's territory, thereby marking a pivotal moment in her progressive journey towards autonomy. She realises that, although she holds dear her native village, this can no longer be the place of happiness and safety it represented for her before their 'exile'. Lucia continues to regard her former home with a sense of loyalty and belonging, but she has distanced herself from it, in order to create her own new system with Renzo in Bergamo. Lucia's new self-confidence and determination is displayed in her relationship with Donna Prassede, the bossy, self-righteous noblewoman who wishes for Lucia to forget about Renzo, whom she calls 'uno scapestrato' (p. 446; 'ne'er-do-well', p. 500). From the start of the novel, the reader knows Lucia for her 'testina bassa, quel non rispondere' (p. 417; 'her way of keeping her little head bent forward, her way of not answering you when you spoke to her', p. 468), but now, she seems finally to have found her voice, firmly rebuking Donna Prassede's allegations. She tells her flatly that 'al suo paese, quel poveretto non aveva mai fatto parlare di sè, altro che in bene; avrebbe voluto, che fosse presente qualcheduno di là, per fargli far testimonianza' (p. 447; 'the poor boy had never caused any talk about himself in the village, except in the way of praise', p. 500). Lucia has grown out of her role as a frightened child and forged a strong alliance with her future

husband, against those who threaten their new family system.

Surprisingly, even Agnese, the parental figure of the betrothed's original family system undergoes a small-scale journey. In fact, after having left Lucia, she goes with Don Abbondio to the Unnamed's castle in order to hide from the Landsknechts' looting and pillage in Lombardy. We could argue that Agnese has experienced, like Renzo and Lucia, a process of change, and if at the beginning of the novel she appears naïve and unresourceful it is because she offers Renzo useless advice, or because she talks out of turn, as we witness in the presence of the convent's nun who tells her 'State zitta voi: già lo so che i parenti hanno sempre una risposta da dare in nome de' loro figliuoli!' (p. 147; 'Be quiet! I know very well that parents are never short of an answer to give in the name of their children', p. 173). Towards the end of the story, Agnese seems more confident as she is the one to decide to find sanctuary at the Unnamed's.<sup>266</sup> After the Landsknechts have left the territory of Lecco, Agnese proceeds with her return journey in order to wait for the other two members of her family to come back and re-establish her system.

We finally find both Renzo and Lucia at the end of their progressive journeys in Milan. But there is one obstacle left – Lucia is still tied to the vow she made at the Unnamed's castle. Padre Cristoforo, who ministers to the sick in Milan's Lazaretto, intervenes and releases Lucia from her vow. Now, with Don Rodrigo dead, and after being reunited with Agnese in their native village, the betrothed are finally free to marry: 'i due promessi andarono, con sicurezza trionfale, proprio a quella chiesa, dove, proprio per bocca di Don Abbondio, furono sposi' (p. 639; 'the betrothed couple went triumphantly and safely to their very own church, and were married by none other than Don Abbondio', p. 713). However, the novel does not close with a simplistically happy ending since Renzo and Lucia must now adjust to yet another series of changes. As such, they emigrate to Bergamo, which

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<sup>266</sup> See Manzoni, *The Betrothed*, p. 480.

they regard ‘come loro’ (p. 641; ‘as their new home’ p. 715). When describing their final separation from the village, the narrator observes:

Anche il bambino riposa volentieri sul seno della balia [...] ma se la balia lo bagna d’assensio, il bambino ritira la bocca, poi torna a provare, ma finalmente se ne stacca; piangendo sì, ma se ne stacca (p. 641).

Even a baby though he will rest gladly enough on the bosom of his nurse [...] if she rubs her nipple with wormwood in order to wean the child, then will he turn his mouth aside; and though he will return to make further trial of it, yet will he leave it for ever in the end; he will leave it with tears, but for ever (p. 715).

Using maternal/weaning imagery, the author portrays human growth, depicting it as painful but inevitable. The baby who, although crying, turns his mouth aside from the nurse’s bosom resembles that of a young person, in this case Renzo and Lucia, that must separate from everything dear in order to reach adulthood. Life in the new town, however, has its difficulties. Renzo’s fellow workers are disappointed when they see Lucia, whom they had imagined as a fairytale princess: ‘Eh! L’è questa? Dopo tanto tempo, dopo tanti discorsi, s’aspettava qualcosa di meglio. Cos’è poi? Una contadina come tant’altre’ (p. 642; ‘What? Is this really her? After all this time, and so much talk, we might have expected something better. What is she, after all? A country girl like any other!’, p. 716). Renzo’s support of his wife is immediately put into action, and when an opportunity arises he moves his family to another village to work with Bortolo in a new cotton mill. Here, for Lucia, ‘si può dire che non dispiacque’ (p. 643; ‘it can be said the people there liked the look of her’, p. 718).

In contrast to Zola and Hardy’s novels, which depict the life of already established

family systems, in *I promessi sposi* Manzoni highlights the process leading the characters to develop and finally form their own system. On the last page we finally find, as Giorgio De Rienzo explains, Renzo at peace; after his long and agitated wandering, the young man seems appeased and his new family system functional.<sup>267</sup> Manzoni actually writes ‘il bello era a sentirlo [Renzo] raccontare le sue avventure: e finiva sempre col dire le gran cose che ci aveva imparate, per governarsi meglio in avvenire’ (p. 645; ‘the best thing was to hear [Renzo] tell the story of his adventures, which always ended with a list of important things he had learned, to enable him to do better in the future’, p. 719). For this reason, we are told that Renzo insists that all his children should learn how to read and write claiming ‘giacchè la c’era questa birberia, dovevano almeno profittarne anche loro’ (p. 645; ‘since this scoundrelly business has come to stay, he said, they might as well have the benefit of it’, p. 719). In addition, it is clear how the regional macrocosm in Manzoni’s masterpiece does not hinder the process of separation or individualisation of its members. Instead, it seems to provide them with the tools to adapt and change along their way. Paraphrasing Gorizio Viti, the region seems like an environment that surrounds human creatures, almost a musical piece accompanying their life events, rather than a vindictive superior force.<sup>268</sup> This is due to the fact that the regional macrocosm does not seem to work as an authoritarian *pater familias*. God, to whom every member of both the macrocosmic and microcosmic systems is subjected represents authority in *I promessi sposi*.

In the Italian novel, the journey inside and outside the region has a positive outcome, as the characters overall tend to change – they grow up, learn the ways of the world through a series of incidents and develop their adaptation skills such as knowing when to speak one’s mind or when it is better to remain silent. According to Guido Baldi, separation from the

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<sup>267</sup> De Rienzo, *L’avventura della parola*, p. 109.

<sup>268</sup> Gorizio Viti, *Conoscere I promessi sposi* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1994), p. 134.

familiar, although painful, is an indispensable instant in the formation process of the two protagonists.<sup>269</sup> Renzo in fact claims ‘Ho imparato a non mettermi ne’ tumulti: ho imparato a non predicare in piazza: ho imparato a guardare con chi parlo’ (p. 645; ‘I’ve learned not to get mixed up in riots; I’ve learned not to preach at street corners; I have learned to see whom I am talking to’, p. 720). Moreover, the protagonists are able to leave their ‘nest’, since they abandon their hometown, their native village to enter the unknown, where they face numerous difficulties. The novel does not end with a return, though; instead, they establish a family system outside their original microcosm, and there is consequently a disentanglement from the familiar place, a separation and individualisation and, finally, an evolution. Renzo and Lucia’s journey through the region and beyond seems to represent the various steps of a journey through life: the village represents childhood, the accidents in Milan and the job in Bergamo, together with the abduction from Monza and the time spent with Donna Prassede, represent for Renzo and Lucia the transition of adolescence. Conclusively, adulthood for the two protagonists is found in their newly found hometown in the territory of Bergamo. Contrarily to the novels we have previously analysed, *I promessi sposi*, following Aldo Manetti’s ideas, appears to be a deeply optimistic narrative. Manetti claims – and I shall discuss this notion in more detail in the next chapter – that it proposes a laborious and active ideal of life and that it instils hope in justice’s triumph even on this earth; in fact the novel ‘does not inculcate resignation, it suggests patience, which is very different’.<sup>270</sup>

In conclusion, from my twofold analysis of family and regional spaces in the three chosen novels, it is possible to claim that the region acts as a metaphorical family system often replacing actual ones when these lack hierarchy, boundaries and structure, providing or

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<sup>269</sup> Baldi, *I promessi sposi*, p. 130.

<sup>270</sup> Aldo Manetti, *Alessandro Manzoni e il Risorgimento* (Bergamo: Secomandi, 1973), p. 74.



hindering its members' development. In *La Terre* and *The Return of the Native* the region appears as a pathological family system, as it does not allow its components to leave freely but anchors them in and places them on a level of deep dependence from it. The region, as we saw, becomes the supreme authority in Zola and Hardy's novels, an enmeshed and vindictive *pater familias* that never abandons its members, as it governs their lives and decision-makings, thereby handicapping their will and endeavours to become autonomous. As we witnessed with Fouan the land determines his newly dysfunctional relationship with his offspring, leading him to begin a regressive journey that terminates in death. Comparably, in Egdon Heath, both Eustacia and Wildeve try to escape from the confines of the region, rebelling against its authority. Since these characters seem to threaten the status quo of the macrocosmic family system, the region, once again as *mater* and *pater familias*, punishes them for their rebellion and eliminates them. What appears different between *La Terre* and *The Return of the Native* is that although both regional systems develop with their members a deeply close-knit and entangled relationship, in Hardy such a system rewards those elements with survival, as we saw with Thomasin and Clym, who prove their faithfulness to the region, a concept that appears absent in Zola. In these novels, the journey on a large scale and as key to individualisation is almost non-existent, underlining the lack of personal growth and the acquisition of autonomy and identity. In Hardy, we discovered a number of wanderings around the heath, specifically by Eustacia and Wildeve, but their confinement to the region does not allow their movements to become representative of an evolutionary journey.

Contrary to Zola and Hardy's novels where the microcosmic families we studied were to some extent already established, in *I promessi sposi* we uncovered the separate journeys the two protagonists must endure, in order to establish in this instance a functional family system. In Manzoni's novel, the regional odyssey concept truly takes form as a pivotal device through which Renzo, Lucia, and to a lesser extent, Agnese, are able to separate from their original

macrocosm, acquire autonomy and individuality and finally create their new family. The true authority in the novel to which all the characters and regional systems are subjected to is divine providence. This is also the reason why Renzo's journey resembles that of a pilgrimage, since the young man not only needs to grow as a person and individual, but he must also find his hierarchical place in relation to this providence. Only when Renzo recognises God's authority does his process of change actually end and he, as an individual, can truly be reunited with Lucia.

To complete my study on the functional and dysfunctional behaviours of family and region, I found it necessary to verify how the two spaces respond to influences deriving from national questions. While this chapter is dedicated to what Lois Bethe Schoenfeld calls the 'internal problems' of the three regional systems, it is now crucial to observe their 'external problems' and therefore how the three authors' macrocosms adapt to the nineteenth-century economical, political, social, and religious context in which they exist.<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> Lois Bethe Schoenfeld, *Dysfunctional Families in the Wessex Novels of Thomas Hardy* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2005), p. 27.

**Chapter Three: Regional Space and Family Systems: Political, Economical and Social  
Implications**

In this chapter, I continue to investigate the travel trope, focusing on the socio-political, economic and religious implications of mobility for the family systems and regional spaces described in the regions portrayed in *La Terre*, *The Return of the Native* and *I promessi sposi*. As Sandy Petrey has shown, a family system lives, changes and effectively exists in a certain milieu: ‘It is not the milieu that explains character’, claims Petrey, ‘but the character that explains the milieu’.<sup>272</sup> My contention is that in these novels the region is a lived space produced by specific interpersonal, economic and cultural interactions – and not by a natural environment outside of time and untouched by history, as Frémont and others argue.<sup>273</sup> Nor do I share Roberto Dainotto and Alfredo Sisca’s view that the region is primarily a repository of history and tradition against innovations coming from the outside, or that consequently regionalist novels, or novels including regionalist characteristics are limited to memorialising objectively and in detail the folkloristic traditions of the rural community without venturing further.<sup>274</sup> A socio-political and economic analysis of *La Terre*, *The Return of the Native* and *I promessi sposi* will enable me to confute to some extent the critics’ identification of the region as an entity crystallised in time and space, and to investigate whether Zola, Hardy and Manzoni’s texts support a political vision of the ‘locale.’ In particular, I will consider to what degree they see regional societies as set on a trajectory towards the modern nation-state, namely towards the inclusion of the region into the larger map of the nation in both a political

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<sup>272</sup> Petrey, ‘Zola and the Representation of Society’, p. 41.

<sup>273</sup> Frémont, *La Région*, p. 138.

<sup>274</sup> Sisca, *Cultura e letteratura*, p. 46. Dainotto, *Place in Literature*, p. 23.

and economic sense. On the one hand, *La Terre*, *The Return of the Native* and *I promessi sposi* present us with a celebration of local traditions and ancient social order; on the other hand, nevertheless, they show their decline and the consequent birth of new social classes coherent with the economic and political changes produced by a new and ever-changing capitalist society in the course of the nineteenth century.

The chapter will focus on four key socio-economic and political themes. First, we encounter ‘agrarian capitalism’ in a regional society.<sup>275</sup> Capitalism, as we shall see, does not belong simply to the urban environment but is also present, if less evidently, in the rural world and tends to produce the same alienation that Marx discovered in the great city factories. The second thematic cluster I will analyse revolves around religion, faith and the Church, in order to assess its function in a regional environment. Third, issues of gender and social class will be considered, in order to revise assumptions of regional literature as wholly embedded in and reflecting the patrician and patriarchal order. In addition, I shall survey the theme of justice, especially for those at the bottom of the social scale. As we shall see later in this chapter, characters who seek justice discover that they must go well beyond the region’s boundaries to find it.

My starting point will be the representation of the road. In Chapter Two, I have identified the road as the device through which the protagonists begin their individualisation, in order to separate from their original family system, develop and form a new one. On the one hand, more concretely, the road also plays an important political and economic function within the region, in that because it enables movement, traffic and exchange, it is the indispensable means of economic development and can symbolise social openness and inclusion. On the other hand, as in Hardy’s novel, the road can also be an old, unused relic,

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<sup>275</sup> Joseph Hillis Miller, *Communities in Fiction* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), p. 114.

which in actual fact underlines closure towards the outer world. Interestingly, the description of a road is present at the beginning of all three novels.

### La Beauce and the Shadow of Capitalism

In *La Terre*, Zola introduces the reader to the region of La Beauce via Jean's walk towards Hourdequin's farm, La Borderie. After a description of the fields that make up the region's homogeneous landscape, we finally encounter a road:

Au milieu, une route, la route de Châteaudun à Orléans, d'une blancheur de craie, s'en allait toute droite pendant quatre lieues, déroulant le défilé géométrique des poteaux du télégraphe. Et rien autre, que trois ou quatre moulins de bois, sur leur pied de charpente, les ailes immobiles (p. 20).

Down the middle went the chalk-white road joining Châteaudun to Orléans, straight as a die for a good fifteen miles, geometrically marked by its line of telegraph poles. And that was all, except for three or four wooden windmills on their timber frames, their sails quite still (p. 3).

From this depiction, the road appears solitary and deserted, unfolding across the vast flatland of the region. Its metaphorical solitude evokes Jean's own isolation. He actually comes from Provence, and so he is alone and a stranger in La Beauce. While we tend to consider the road as a way of reducing distance and facilitating relations between different places, in *La Terre* it merely connects the two small towns of Châteaudun and Orléans within La Beauce. This underlines the territorial confinement of Zola's region and reveals that it has no interest in being in contact with the wider nation to which it belongs. We are therefore led to believe that La Beauce's politics and economy develop within its boundaries and the territory is hostile to external influences. The road is used only on Saturday mornings for market day, when carts

carry produce from one village to another, thus highlighting an exclusively local, small-scale commerce. Zola writes ‘lorsque Jean fut au bout du champ, il s’arrêta encore, jeta un coup d’œil en bas, [...] la route de Cloyes, sillonnée ce samedi-là par les carrioles des paysans allant au marché’ (p. 21; ‘when Jean reached the end of the field, he stopped once more and cast his eye down, [...] he could see the procession of carts coming in from the country on their Saturday morning market day’, p. 4).

As the novel proceeds, the road gains an increasingly central role. Monsieur Hourdequin, owner of La Borderie and mayor of Rognes, is keen to persuade his fellow countrymen to accept the construction of a new road from Rognes to Châteaudun:

Naturellement, la ferme avait grand intérêt à cette voie nouvelle, [...]. Il était, en effet, question de relier le chemin à la route du bas, ce qui faciliterait aux voitures l’accès de l’église, où l’on ne grimpait que par de sentiers de chèvre (p. 72).

The new route would naturally be a great advantage to the farm, [...]. The proposal was to link the road up to the lower one, thus making it easier for vehicles to drive up to the church, which at the moment was accessible only by goat tracks (p. 49).

Zola makes it clear that Hourdequin is moved by purely individualistic economic interests rather than by civic spirit or a love of progress. If in Chapter Two individualisation carried a positive connotation as it characterised a functioning individual and consequently a functional family system, individualism here – and we shall see this in more detail later on – becomes a marker of the incipient capitalist mentality. On the one hand, those in favour of the road hope to profit from it, such as the rich Hourdequin who ‘ne désirait si vivement ce chemin que parce qu’il passait devant la ferme et desservait plusieurs de ses pièces’ (p. 162; ‘was keen on

the new road merely because it would pass by his farm and give access to a number of his fields', p. 131), Delhomme and the grocer Macqueron 'dont les terrains allaient se trouver en bordure' (p. 165; 'who also had land lying beside the route', p. 131). On the other hand, there are Lengaigne, the village's tobacconist, and the schoolmaster Lequeu who strongly oppose the issue. Lengaigne simply thinks 'n'ayant rien à y gagner' (p. 166; 'there [is] nothing in it for him', p. 131). Lequeu instead is wholly indifferent to the matter: 'Moi, je n'en dis rien, ça ne me regarde pas' (p. 74; 'I'm not saying anything. It's none of my business', p. 51). Overall, what is clear is that neither of them is willing to pay for a new road: 'Puisqu'on a déjà une route! C'est bien le plaisir de dépenser de l'argent' (p. 163; 'We've already got a road. It's just for the fun of spending money', p. 131). Also in this case we can evince the local and closed connotations of Zola's regional economy, which appears to be moved only by small-scale private interests and not by potential future development and aspirations to 'join modernity'. In a psychodynamic as well as an economic sense, Zola's La Beauce is a microcosm with rigid and impermeable boundaries.

I illustrated earlier how Zola's region mirrors a disengaged family system obsessed with money and land. In fact, as soon as the parliamentary candidate for La Beauce's constituency, Monsieur de Chédeville, promises to obtain governmental funding for the new road, everyone agrees to it. As expected, 'quinze jours plus tard, M. de Chédeville était nommé à une grande majorité; et dès la fin d'août, la subvention était accordée à la commune, pour l'ouverture de la nouvelle route. Les travaux commencèrent tout de suite' (p. 165; 'a fortnight later, Monsieur de Chédeville was elected with large majority; and by the end of August the commune received its subsidy for the new road. Work started on it at once', p. 134). Through the implied connivance of Monsieur de Chédeville and the mayor Hourdequin, Zola seems to be exposing how during the second half of the nineteenth century, parliamentary candidates and administrators used to buy the popular vote in exchange for



subsidies for roads or schools. Roger Magraw, in his social history of France, claims that the candidates were capable of appealing to ‘peasant voters with populist rhetoric against the *seigneurs*’ and the clergy, who were critical of the Second Empire.<sup>276</sup> As we shall see in the section on religion, Hourdequin seeks subsidy only for the road and not for the renovation of the decayed church. As a consequence, the road becomes unexpectedly a symbol of political and economic individualism, subservient to the particular interests of wealthier members of society who still draw their power and authority from the land.

Zooming in from the new route that is being traced across the map of La Beauce to a domestic interior, we can focus on the social representation of La Beauce’s inhabitants gathered together around a fire. In Chapter Five, Zola describes the evening of the first of November ‘la Toussaint’ (All Saints Day), when the peasants gather in Old Fouan’s cowshed. We notice how this scene belongs to the regionalist world of folkloristic traditions and customs for the community of La Beauce. However, Zola does not only describe it merely to add local colour to the story by detailing the region’s customs; instead, the circumstantial event of La Toussaint becomes a plot device to present his cast of characters and their relationship with modernity and the world outside their circumscribed environment. Moreover, soon the discussion turns to the war, more specifically the second Italian War of Independence (27<sup>th</sup> April – 12<sup>th</sup> July 1859). Clearly, the community is aware of this crucial event in the recent national past, with implications beyond the boundaries of France. However, this does not mean that the people of La Beauce feel politically involved in national matters. Old Fouan reflects:

Ah! La guerre, elle en fait du mal! C’est la mort de la culture... Oui, quand les garçons partent, les meilleurs bras s’en vont, on le voit bien à la besogne ; et, quand ils

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<sup>276</sup> Roger Magraw, *France 1800-1914: A Social History* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 141.

reviennent, dame ! ils sont changés, ils n'ont plus le cœur à la charrue... Vaudrait mieux le choléra que la guerre ! (p. 83).

Yes, war's a disaster all around, it's the death of farming... When the lads go off, it's the strongest who go, you can see it when there's hard work to be done; and when they come back, well, they've changed, their hearts are no longer in ploughing. Cholera's better than war (p. 59).

Old Fouan's words represent the voice of a regional society focused tightly on itself, both economically, as we saw with the road, and politically. Involuntary pacifists, the peasants of La Beauce, are untouched by patriotic sentiments or political ideology, and they view war simply as a pointless disruption to the rural rhythm of life, which threatens the community's survival. Old Fouan does not talk about the war from a political perspective but in terms of the impact it might have on the plot of land that ensures the family's livelihood. Buteau adds weight to his father's ruthless Darwinian logic by symbolically pushing the idea of war away from the region, stating that there are plenty of other children, not belonging to La Beauce, to be sent to fight.<sup>277</sup>

In reality, despite the peasants' closure towards what lies beyond the region's boundaries, in this passage they deal with a national event, namely war, which unsettles their everyday life. From this perspective, it is possible to confute the idea that the region is a static entity outside time and history. In this case, we witness how the characters are involved in not only a historical but also a political national matter. The only character who sees war from a nationalistic perspective is Jean Macquart, which comes as no surprise, as Jean is an outsider, a former soldier who has indeed fought in Italy. For this reason, he is nicknamed 'Corporal'

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<sup>277</sup> Zola, *Earth*, p. 60.

and thought of as an 'étranger' (p. 406; 'foreigner', p. 358). When the peasants ask Jean what his views are on war, he claims

La guerre, ce n'est pas si difficile qu'on le croit... On tombe au sort, n'est-ce pas ? On est bien obligé de faire son devoir. Seulement, ça peut encore avoir du bon, pour celui que son métier dégoûte et qui rage, quand l'ennemi vient nous emmerder en France (p. 85).

Well, war's not as bad as people think. You draw lots, don't you? You've got to do your duty. All the same, it can be a good thing for someone who doesn't like his job and hates the idea of an enemy coming and busting things up here in our own country (p. 61).

Jean's words here suggest that dissatisfaction with his work, and a restless, unsettled temperament, made him susceptible to the aggressive (and abstract) nationalism that fuels wartime politics. By contrast, a born-and-bred *Beauceron* like Buteau, Old Fouan's son, lives in contented symbiosis with the land and is wholly dependent upon it for his own sense of self: 'il était un vrai terrien, attaché au sol [...] il semblait en tirer un orgueil, d'avoir ainsi poussé dans sa terre, avec l'entêtement borné et vivace d'un arbre' (p. 84; 'he was a real land-worker and loved it [...] and he seemed to be proud of it, proud to have its roots in his own patch of land, bound to it like a tough, hardy tree', p. 60). Joining the army for the love of one's country has no appeal for people such as Buteau.

As the evening progresses, Old Fouan asks Jean to read *Les Malheurs et le Triomphe de Jacques Bonhomme*, 'un petit livre grasseyé, un de ces livres de propagande bonapartiste, dont l'empire avait inondé les campagnes' (p. 86; 'a greasy little book, one of those books of

Bonapartist propaganda which every village and hamlet of France had been flooded with under the Empire', p. 62). In a clear critique of Second-Empire authoritarianism, Zola uses the derogatory word 'graisseux' and the verb 'inondé' to emphasise the imposition of the book on the peasants. The booklet tells the history of French peasantry, embodied by the Everyman character of Jacques Bonhomme. Jean reads about the peasant's progress from his initial condition of slavery, inhuman work conditions and exorbitant taxation, the famines and epidemics he had to survive throughout the century, to the conquest of freedom with the Revolution: 'en une nuit, le laboureur était devenu l'égal du seigneur qui, en vertu de parchemins, buvait sa sueur et dévorait le fruit de ses veilles' (p. 91; 'in a single night the tillers of the soil became the equal of their lord and master who, by virtue of ancient title deeds, had been living on the sweat of their brow and devouring the fruits of their sleepless nights', p. 67). However, the peasants of La Beauce are deeply sceptical about this version of events, and Buteau, once again, expresses his disapproval with a silent shrug of the shoulders:

Belle affaire de se révolter! Oui, pour que les gendarmes vous ramassent ! Tous, d'ailleurs, depuis que le petit livre contenait les rébellions de leurs ancêtres, écoutaient les yeux baissés, sans hasarder un geste, pris de méfiance, bien qu'ils fussent entre eux (p. 91).

What was the point of being rebellious? So that the gendarmes could cart you off to prison? Indeed, since the little book had started talking of their ancestors' revolts, they had all been listening with downcast eyes, not daring to make a gesture, full of distrust even though they were with people whom they knew (p. 66).

Buteau's distrust seems to echo Zola's malcontent towards the Empire.<sup>278</sup> Napoleon, the child of the revolution and the two empires, had brought no amelioration to the peasants' life conditions. Yes, after the revolution they were free and owned the land, but their freedom was only formal, as they were still poor and enslaved to their fields. In support of this notion, Fouan claims 'Seulement, qu'est-ce que ça nous a foutu, leur liberté et leur égalité, à Rose et moi? ...Est-ce-que nous en sommes plus gras, après nous être esquinés pendant cinquante ans?' (p. 92; 'What's all their liberty and equality done for Rose and me? Are we any better off, after slaving away for fifty years?', p. 67). With these words the peasants' individualistic spirit and their preoccupation for personal affairs emerge once more. At the same time, however, Zola seems to side with them and show, through the story of *Jacques Bonhomme*, that they are the resulting product of a history of abuse and injustice.

Zola's anti-imperialist ideas are made even clearer when Jean reaches the book's conclusion that praises regional life as idyllic and peaceful, reminding the readers that 'l'argent est une chimère. Si tu as la paix du cœur, ta fortune est faite' (p. 94 ; 'money is an empty dream. The only real wealth is peace of mind!', p. 69). The absurdity of this paternalistic propaganda is brought out fully, as the contrast between the written word and the reality of the scene is a striking one. As Samia Chalhoub writes:

Ce qui a provoqué cette misère qu'endure tout un peuple, la classe dominante est seule à le savoir puisque Zola fait tomber la responsabilité première sur le système socio-économique du temps qui tout en agissant en faveur de la classe dominante, opprime l'ouvrier et le diminue dans sa dignité jusqu'à l'approcher de l'animal.

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<sup>278</sup> Samia Chalhoub, 'L'Enfant à travers les déterminismes du milieu dans *Les Rougon-Macquart*', *The French Review*, 4 (1993), 595-606 (p. 601).

The ruling class is the only one to know who has caused this misery that afflicts an entire population, since Zola primarily puts the blame on the time's socio-economic system that while acting in favour of the ruling class, oppresses the worker and reduces his dignity to that of an animal.<sup>279</sup>

The regime wants people to believe country life alone leads to real happiness, while the peasants of La Beauce are all sitting in a cowshed keeping warm with the breath of the animals, bitterly resenting their poverty.

It is interesting that Jean is the designated reader of such a book. The peasants' estrangement to the content thereof is enhanced by the fact that it comes to them through the voice of a complete outsider. Just as they distrust *Jacques Bonhomme*, they dislike Jean and 'on l'avait accusé de venir manger le pain des autres, dans un pays qui n'était pas le sien' (p. 133; 'accuse him of coming along and taking the bread of others, in a part of the country not his own', p. 133). He is a stranger and cannot truly share the historical vicissitudes of the peasants, as when, at the end of his reading, he states that 'Ça irait mieux peut-être avec l'instruction [...] il faudrait avoir des écoles pour apprendre à cultiver' (p. 94; 'Things would be better with more education. Set up schools where you can study agriculture', p. 69), Old Fouan attacks progress and change, reinforcing what Buteau has said before:

Fichez-nous donc la paix, avec votre science! Plus on en sait, moins ça marche [...] Et voyez si M. Hourdequin n'a pas mangé de l'argent gros comme lui, à se fourrer dans les inventions nouvelles...Non, non, c'est foutu, le paysan reste le paysan !' (p. 94).

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<sup>279</sup> Ibid., p. 603.

Oh, get along with your science! The more you know, worse things get [...] And look at Monsieur Hourdequin, who's spent no end of money on new inventions [...] no, it's no bloody good, a peasant's a peasant!' (p. 70).

Old Fouan states openly that progress and change bring nothing but trouble and loss of money, as educated children might no longer wish to work the land. When he states that 'a peasant's a peasant', he introduces the idea that in a regional environment change is a utopia and peasants wish to remain at the level of a pre-revolutionary Jacques.

As we discovered from the psychodynamic point of view in the previous chapter, La Beauce allows for no change. Throughout the novel we do not encounter a single character that upgrades or downgrades his social status, and so if they are introduced as peasants, they will remain as such for the entire novel. When Old Fouan's daughter Fanny becomes rich after working hard on her land, she soon starts regretting her condition: 'elle en arrivait à être fâchée avec tout le pays' (p. 320; 'she was coming to dislike the whole village', p. 279). We can argue that she perceives a change in her social status now that she is richer, but this is only apparent and not concretised, as she cannot separate herself from her work on the land, consequently remaining a peasant all her life. Similarly, people who are not born farmers, such as Jean and Hourdequin the landowner, cannot take on the role and are forced in a way to leave the community, as they do not belong. Hourdequin attempts to escape his role of small landowner to cover that of modern industrialist and manufacturer, as we shall see in due course, but he fails and is murdered. On a metaphorical level, the other character trapped in his role is Jean, who, throughout the entire novel, strains to be accepted by La Beauce's community. Nevertheless, he remains a stranger, and after his wife dies, he joins the army again going back to his footloose life as a soldier. Conclusively, the characters are not only anchored to their rigid family roles as we saw in Chapter Two, but we also find that same

rigidity at the macrocosmic level of society and to a certain extent social class. It appears to lack what we might call a 'social elevator'. In the novel, in fact, the characters remain fixed in their inescapable roles of 'poverty-stricken' peasants (p. 69).

The economic exploitation and lack of social progress Zola observes in La Beauce add a motif to his portrait of French society transformed by capitalism in the *Rougon-Macquart* series.<sup>280</sup> As William Gallois has shown, Zola's collection of novels aims to 'detail the whole of capitalism through a series of descriptions of its parts'.<sup>281</sup> Zola investigates capitalism's impact in all areas of society: in the squalid neighbourhoods of working-class Paris in *L'Assommoir* and *Nana*; in the glamorous department store portrayed in *Au bonheur des dames*; in the mines of *Germinal*. With *La Terre*, he depicts the origins of agrarian capitalism and its consequences for peasant life and social relations.<sup>282</sup>

Marx posited that the modern capitalist is the equivalent of the old 'landed proprietor'.<sup>283</sup> In a similar vein, Zola focuses his critique of capitalism on the entrepreneur Alexandre Hourdequin, whose actions affect the smallholders in the region. Hourdequin's family had made their way up to jobs in the local administration and state-owned industries. Zola writes 'tous avaient eu des emplois dans la gabelle: un, grènetier à Chartres; un autre, contrôleur à Châteaudun' (p. 100; 'they had all been excisemen: one of them the manager of a salt warehouse in Chartres, another a superintendent in Châteaudun', p. 74). After the revolution, Hourdequin's father invested his inheritance in La Borderie, a farm of three

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<sup>280</sup> See Mbarga, 'Émile Zola', p. 100.

<sup>281</sup> William Gallois, *Zola: The History of Capitalism* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2000), p. 109.

<sup>282</sup> Émile Zola, *Au bonheur des dames* (Paris: Presses-Pocket, 1990). For Zola's critique of capitalism and its impact on society compare also Evelyne Cosset, *Les Quatre Évangiles d'Émile Zola* (Geneva: Bibliothèque-Charpentier, 1990), p. 8.

<sup>283</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital* (London: Wordsworth, 2013), p. 520.



hundred and seventy acres, with the idea of reselling it for a large profit. However, as property prices fell, he remained imprisoned in the role of farmer his whole life. Alexandre left school to help his father, as ‘la terre le passionnait’ (p. 101; ‘the land was his passion’, p. 74) and acquired more land through marriage. In contrast to Old Fouan, who skimps on everything and denies his family even the most basic comforts, Hourdequin is a *bon viveur*, a new type of bourgeois who enjoys leisure and consumption: ‘sans l’enrichir, lui avait permis de mener une vie large de gros homme sanguine, décide à ne jamais rester sur ses appétits’ (p. 101; ‘without making him rich, [the farm] allowed him to live the comfortable life of a big, red-blooded man, determined never to deprive himself of whatever he wanted’, p. 75). This quote shows how compared to the rest of La Beauce’s inhabitants, Hourdequin belongs to a higher social class. Throughout the novel, the tobacconist Languigne often calls him one of ‘ces bourgeois d’aujourd’hui, pis encore que les seigneurs d’autrefois’ (p. 72; ‘the rich bourgeois nowadays, even worse than the old aristocrats’, p. 49). The tobacconist’s words seem to echo not only a social rivalry towards the bourgeoisie, but also atavistic feelings of hostility and opposition between the rural and the urban worlds, as Hourdequin grew up in the town of Châteaudun. Moreover, Languigne defends in part ‘les seigneurs d’autrefois’, considered an integral part of the region because they were resident members; instead, ‘the rich bourgeois’, even though they are land proprietors, are considered strangers in the community, as they come from the town, and therefore they are not accredited any kind of membership of the region.

With his many acres and salaried farm labourers, Hourdequin is the prototype of an agrarian capitalist. Although there are no explicit examples in the novel of the working conditions of his employees, we are nonetheless told that ‘tout ce monde couchait dans la bergerie, pêle-mêle sur de la paille, les filles, les femmes, les hommes, demi-nus, à cause de la grosse chaleur’ (p. 230; ‘they were all sleeping in the sheep pens, the girls, the women and the

men all jumbled together in the straw, half-naked because of the intense heat', p. 194). These cramped living conditions suggest not only a lack of morality and decorum, with women, men and animals sharing the same sleeping quarters, but also that Hourdequin wastes no money on his seasonal workers – like a true capitalist, he follows Marx's 'logic of profit'.<sup>284</sup> Much to the farmers' amusement, who think the contents of chamber pots are more than adequate to the task, he buys expensive new chemical fertilisers and hires a steam threshing machine in order to increase production and be able to compete with the American market. He tries to persuade Monsieur de Chédeville to set up 'D'autres écoles, un enseignement pratique, des cours gradués d'agriculture' (p. 153; 'Other kinds of school, a practical teaching, graded courses in agriculture', p. 122), in order to re-confer on La Beauce its old title of 'granary of France' (p. 121). However, he is no altruistic social reformer, as his first motivation is always profit. Furthermore, he believes that if the peasants were to learn scientific methods of agriculture, the land's production 'doublerait' (p. 153; 'would double', p. 121), profit margins would increase and he could beat the competition of imported goods from America.

However, Hourdequin's initiatives come to nothing. Obsessed with keeping up with the latest innovations, he spends ever-growing sums of money on new methods of cultivation that yield no profit: 'rien n'y avait fait, ni l'énergie, ni les cultures nouvelles, les engrais, les machines' (p. 442; 'nothing had been of any use, his enthusiasm, his new methods of farming, his fertilisers, his machines', p. 391). Instead of opening a bright new future, his commitment to modernisation drives him deeper into debt, as 'le travail accumulé, le capital engagé l'enfermaient chaque jour davantage' (p. 101; 'the work that had piled up, the capital invested, held him increasingly a prisoner everyday', p. 75). Hourdequin's failure to turn his farm into a grand industrial establishment expresses Zola's anxiety about progress. Although a great supporter of scientific and technologic advancement, the author was convinced that

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<sup>284</sup> Marx, *Capital*, p. 98.

‘progress brings alienation as well as liberation, and modern man feels trapped by forces he has created but cannot fully control’.<sup>285</sup> The disgraced Hourdequin also loses his position as mayor of La Beauce to a candidate who presents himself as the true voice of the peasant classes. The victory of Macqueron, Zola comments, is a result of ‘la haine séculaire, indomptable, du paysan contre les possesseurs du sol’ (p. 72; ‘the age-old, implacable hatred of the peasant for the big landowner’, p. 50) and heralds the beginning of politicised class struggle.

In the end, Hourdequin is grotesquely killed in an act of sexual jealousy by one of his farm-hands, who then sets fire to the farm. Attempts to bring modernity to La Beauce end in total annihilation, not only of the capitalist himself, but also of his machinery and his capital as well. We can hypothesise that Zola destroys Hourdequin’s farm in the novel in order to erase metaphorically the possible unemployment and poverty derived from the use of machines rather than man’s labour. As Marx reports, in fact, ‘the instrument of labour, when it takes the form of a machine, immediately becomes a competitor of the workman himself’.<sup>286</sup> Hourdequin’s ending leads us to believe – and this is also supported by Sandy Petrey – that Zola was a great supporter of the locale and necessarily fought capitalism due to its tendency to erase the variety of customs and traditions of which a nation is made and to flatten all forms of regional diversities.<sup>287</sup>

However, Hourdequin is not the only selfish, greedy character in the novel, since the peasants of La Beauce are far from being idealised as a utopian pre-capitalist community. Zola shows at every turn how they are concerned only with their few acres, envious of their

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<sup>285</sup> Brian Nelson, ‘Zola and the Nineteenth Century’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Emile Zola*, ed. by Nelson, pp. 1-20 (p. 7).

<sup>286</sup> Marx, *Capital*, p. 296.

<sup>287</sup> Petrey, ‘Zola and the Representation of Society’, p. 41.

neighbour and terrified by the possibility of a communist revolution. At the division of Old Fouan's property, Buteau is furious at his siblings, who he suspects have set him up to draw the third lot, i.e. 'le mauvais' (p. 76; 'the bad one', p. 53). Neither are farmers enthused at the prospect of a more egalitarian future. When, in one of his drunken speeches, Jesus Christ tells them that soon communism will abolish private property and the land will belong to everyone, they react with indignation: 'Comment? Leurs biens n'étaient pas à eux, on viendrait les leur prendre?' (p. 228; 'So their property wasn't their own, and someone would come and take it from them?', p. 192). Zola's unromantic portrayal of La Beauce shows a rural world deeply corrupted by the same individualism and alienation that shapes the urban working classes under capitalism.

According to Marx, men's prerogative over animals is their free, creative and universal labour, while in a capitalist society men are subjected to an imposed, repetitive and unilateral work 'repeated day after day with unvarying uniformity'.<sup>288</sup> Whether smallholders, landowners or labourers, the people of La Beauce are imprisoned in the ever-repeating cycle of agricultural work: 'des moins s'écoulèrent, l'hiver passa, puis le printemps, et le train accoutumé de Rognes continuait, il fallait des années pour que les choses eussent l'air de s'être faites, dans cette morne vie de travail, sans cesse recommençante' (p. 338; 'months went by, winter came and went, followed by spring, and life in Rognes continued much as before; it needed years for it to look as if anything had been achieved, in this mournful life of never-ending toil', p. 296).<sup>289</sup> They also present the symptoms of alienation, as the land itself

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<sup>288</sup> Marx, *Capital*, p. 283.

<sup>289</sup> The concept that the unfolding of seasons, from an agricultural point of view, gives rhythm to the whole novel and underlines the subjugation of La Beauce's inhabitants is found in Olivier Got, *Les Jardins de Zola: psychanalyse et paysage mythique dans les Rougon-Macquart* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002), p. 218.

is their all-powerful master, alienating the fruit of their labour and dominating every aspect of their lives: ‘combien pourtant elle était indifférent et ingrate, la terre! On avait beau l’adorer, elle ne s’échauffait pas, ne produisait pas un grain de plus’ (p. 92; ‘yet how thankless and indifférent that land was! However much you adored it, its heart never softened, it would not produce a single extra grain’, p. 68). In particular, the animalistic sexuality and amoral behaviour Zola ceaselessly attributes to his characters acquires a new significance if read alongside this passage from Marx’s reflections on the alienation of work:

As a result [of alienation] man [the worker] no longer feels himself to be freely active in any but his animal functions – eating, drinking, procreating [...] And in his human functions he no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal. What is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal.<sup>290</sup>

Most of all, it is the women of La Beauce who are subjected to physical and economic exploitation and alienation at the hands of the patriarchal hierarchy.<sup>291</sup> We shall analyse the depiction of female characters in *La Terre* by looking at Lise, the Cognet girl and Palmyre. When Lise marries Buteau, ownership of the land she inherited from her father passes to him. She becomes his subordinate, working for him in the fields and at home, where she occupies a lower status than farm animals. This point is driven home in a scene where the vet is called to treat a cow in labour, but no doctor assists Lise in her own difficult delivery, and she ends up giving birth alone among the cow dung. Remarkably, Lise herself is horrified at the idea of

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<sup>290</sup> Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* (New York: Prometheus, 1988), p. 75.

<sup>291</sup> Cf. Anna Krakowski, *La Condition de la femme dans l’œuvre d’Emile Zola* (Paris: Nizet, 1974), p. 207.

paying for a doctor: 'Mais non! Ça ira toujours, moi! On n'a pas d'argent à jeter par les fenêtres' (p. 248; 'Don't do it, I can manage. We haven't got money to fling down the drain', p. 212). Lise's complete alienation and moral degradation however, reaches a shocking peak in her determination to prevent her sister Françoise from entering into possession of her rightful share of the land when she comes of age. Lise helps her husband kill Françoise in cold blood and move back into the family house as if nothing had happened: 'ils ne dirent pas qu'ils reprenaient possession de la maison; seulement, ils le faisaient, d'une façon naturelle, comme si la chose allait de soi, à présent que Françoise n'était plus là' (p. 443; 'they didn't say they were repossessing the house; they just did it, quite naturally, as if it went without saying now that Françoise was no longer there', p. 393).

Not unlike Lise, who is a servant in her own house, Jacqueline Cognet is hired by Hourdequin to work 'à de basses besognes, à la vaisselle, au travail de la cour, au nettoyage des bêtes, ce qui achevait de la crotter, salie à plaisir' (p. 102; 'the menial chores, washing up, working in the farmyard, cleaning up the animals, which wound up covering her in filth, and she mucked about in it unrestrainedly', p. 76). Her filthy appearance is soon reflected also in her behaviour: 'tous les valets la culbutaient dans la paille. Pas un homme ne venait à la ferme, sans lui passer sur le ventre', writes Zola (p. 102; 'all farmhands took a tumble with her in the hay; no man came to the farm without hopping on top of her', p. 76). The author describes her as incapable of resisting her impulses, especially towards Tron, 'cette grande brute de vacher, dont la chair tendre de colosse lui donnait des fringales' (p. 230; 'for this tall, rough cowman, colossus though he was, had a soft skin that made her insatiable', p. 195). In addition, when Houdequin's wife dies, she starts to seduce the farmer because, falling victim to the peasants' obsession with money and wealth, her ultimate goal is to marry Hourdequin and inherit his capital.

The third female character I wish to consider is Palmyre. She is the niece of La Grande, Old Fouan's sister, and works the land under her tyrannical orders. In fact, she is completely dehumanised, forced to lead 'une existence de bête de somme menée à coups de fouet, morte de sommeil, le soir, à l'écurie' (p. 144; 'the existence of a beast of burden driven by cracks of the whip, dead tired, into the stable every night', p. 114). Her bestiality, once again, is reflected in her incestuous relationship with her brother, with whom she has intercourse daily, 'cédant ensuite l'un et l'autre au plaisir d'avoir plus chaud, dans cette mesure où ils grelottaient' (p. 145; 'yielding to each other in their pleasure at keeping each other warmer, in that hovel where they shivered with cold', p. 115). Despite the voyeuristic overtones of his descriptions, I would argue that Zola offers a humanely complex portrayal of Palmyre, seeing her as a victim of a brutal social and economic order. It is Palmyre, for instance, who elicits a rare compassionate reaction from Father Godard, the usually angry and violent priest of La Beauce. Even though he knows full well what happens at night between Palmyre and her brother, he hands her a little money on the sly: 'Tenez! Cachez ça, je n'en ai pas pour les autres' (p. 69; 'Take this, but hide it, it's all I've got', p. 47). In an upsetting scene, we see Palmyre collapse under the weight of the sheaves she is trying to tie together, and die: 'elle était allongée, la face au ciel, les bras en croix, comme crucifiée sur cette terre, qui l'avait usée si vite à son dur labeur, et qui la tuait' (p. 240; 'lying face upwards, her arms flung out as though crucified on the earth which had worn her out so quickly and was now killing her off', p. 205). Her dead body in a Christ-like posture testifies to the inhuman suffering she has been subjected to. Her sacrifice, however, is futile and soon forgotten. La Grande seals her death with cold-hearted indifference: 'Je crois bien qu'elle est morte. Vaut mieux ça que d'être à la charge des autres' (p. 241; 'Yes, she's dead all right. Well, it's better than being a burden on other people', p. 205).

In Zola's *La Beauce*, not even religion and faith serve as deterrents against extreme individualism and the encroaching capitalist ideology. By contrast, through the figures of Father Godard and Father Madeleine, Zola introduces the theme of the relationship between the Church and the French state and denounces the corruption and weakness of the Church during the Second Empire. Early in the novel, we encounter Father Godard, the short-tempered, frustrated provincial priest who is forever hurrying to and from his two parishes, as authorities refuse to provide Rognes with a parish priest of their own, in order to save money. As a result, his services are hasty and careless:

Il dépêchait sa messe, mangeait le latin, bousculait le rite. Au prône, sans monter en chaire, assis sur une chaise, au milieu du chœur, il ânonna, se perdit, renonça à se retrouver (p. 67).

He was in a hurry to get through the Mass, gabbling the Latin and hurrying through the ritual. For the sermon, he did not go up into the pulpit but sat on a chair in the middle of the choir stalls, mumbling, losing the thread – and not bothering to recover it (p. 45).

His negligent delivery finds a match in the indifference of his parishioners, who arrive late and behave insolently at church. This is clear with Nénesse and Delphin 'qui jouaient à se pousser, en préparant les burettes' (p. 66; 'who were playfully pushing each other as they prepared the cruets for the altar', p. 43), and Françoise and her two friends 'toutes trois riaient d'une façon inconvenante' (p. 66; 'all three laughing in an unseemly manner', p. 43).

The lack of respect on both sides underlines the growing gap Zola sees between the Church and the common people's real interests and needs. Even though Napoleon III was anxious to secure the support of the Catholic Church throughout the Second Empire, policies



were introduced to limit its power and to introduce secular education.<sup>292</sup> This led the Catholic Church to lose its influence even among regional communities, which had been under its control for hundreds of years – as shown by Zola through the attitude of the peasants – and to a consequent secularisation of education. Gaël Bellalou observes how ‘l’Église réagira très violemment contre ces mesures, car elle avait jusqu’à présent le monopole quasi total sur l’éducation des filles’ (‘the Church will strongly react to these measures, as up until this moment it had detained the monopoly on women’s education’).<sup>293</sup> In the novel, the village’s young girls, who actually belong to the Daughter of Mary and should be pure and chaste, parade their unmarried pregnant bellies, as in the case of Lise, in front of the altar, provoking great scorn in Father Godard.

Another telling scene is when the mayor Hourdequin refuses to cover the costs of the parish church’s renovation. Disgusted by the irreligion of his parishioners, Father Godard explodes with anger:

C’est un nouveau soufflet chaque fois que je viens à Rognes [...] dites ça à votre maire, cherchez un curé et payez-le, si vous en voulez un [...] Mois, je parlerai à monseigneur, je lui raconterai qui vous êtes, je suis bien sûr qu’il m’approuvera [...] Oui, nous verrons qui sera puni. Vous allez vivre sans prêtre, comme des bêtes (p. 262).

I get a fresh slap in the face every time I come to Rognes. You can tell your mayor you can find your own priest and pay him if you want one. I’ll speak to my bishop

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<sup>292</sup> See Magraw, *France 1800-1914*, p. 159.

<sup>293</sup> Gaël Bellalou, *Regards sur la femme dans l’oeuvre d’Emile Zola: ses représentations du livre à l’écran* (Toulon: Les Presses du Midi, 2006), p. 24.

about it, I'll tell him what you're like, I'm sure he'll understand. Oh yes, we'll see who'll be punished. You can live without a priest, like the beasts in the fields (p. 225).

The priest's shocking outburst is a way for Zola to expose the corruption of the Church, which care for the faithful only insofar as they can pay. Shifting from the regional microcosm to the political macrocosm, through the priest, Zola attacks the Church, which instead of providing help and charity to its congregation, pursues individualistic goals and has been penetrated fully by the capitalistic obsession of wealth. In fact, in Father Godard's words, there are a number of unchristian claims, such as when he states 'I'll tell him what you're like', thus disclosing a hint of superiority towards the peasants and profoundly contrasting to the Christian principle 'For God shows no partiality' (Romans 2.11). In addition, Father Godard seems to be blasphemously wishing ill fortune on the peasants when he states 'we'll see who'll be punished', going against the Christian tenet of forgiveness.

As Ralph Gibson explains in his study of the rural and urban French Catholicism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, after the revolution there was a profound need to re-constitute the clergy, especially in those rural parishes overlooked during the Parisian mayhem.<sup>294</sup> Paraphrasing Gibson, the new priests were rapidly trained in seminaries to memorise the definitions and arguments of the used manual and then sent off to the different parishes after being discouraged to pursue any personal critical learning.<sup>295</sup> Therefore, in Godard's partial defence, one can certainly argue that, if the seminary training we imagine instructed the novices in theology and religious morality, it perhaps did not educate the young priests on the earthly difficulties of life, especially for the lower classes, or on how to face the

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<sup>294</sup> Ralph Gibson, *A Social History of French Catholicism 1789-1914* (New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 81.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

parishioners' requests and possible right or wrong attitudes of protests. In this case, therefore, the unprepared abbé is led to react defensively, which in turn manifests as aggression. Nonetheless, Zola does not seem to condone Father Godard's attitude, because he seems to be tainted with the same individualism typical of capitalist society. Through him, Zola seems to compare capitalism to a disease, which has spread also into the religious sphere, influencing even the relationship between the priest and his flock.

Abandoned by their priest, the community seems to manage perfectly well and feel no pangs of conscience at their sinful ways: 'puisque'un prêtre n'était point indispensable, puisque l'expérience prouvait que les récoltes n'y perdaient rien et qu'on n'en mourait pas plus vite, autant valait-il s'en passer toujours' (p. 325; 'as a priest was not indispensable and experience showed that it did not harm to the crops nor did it cause premature death, they might just as well do without one for good', p. 289). In an environment where everything is perceived in materialistic terms, there is no place for religion and faith, spiritual concepts that are invisible and untouchable. Zola gives his readers a great example of the everyday sense of pragmatism when he shows how, although the peasants have their children baptised, they go to church to be married and to attend Mass, more importantly they need the products of the land to feed their children and survive, which seems to be the reason why they choose to spend their council budget on the road rather than on the church. As supported by Ronnie Butler, God for the peasants is only an 'external nuisance' to their everyday life spent working the land.<sup>296</sup>

Father Godard's replacement, Father Madeline, is no improvement. If the former was irascible and impatient, the new priest appears weak, afraid and prone to tears:

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<sup>296</sup> Ronnie Butler, *Zola 'La Terre'* (London: Grant & Cutler, 1984), p. 29.

Il restait immobile, à regarder l'immensité plate et grise de la Beauce, pris d'une sorte de peur, d'une mélancolie désespérée, qui mouillèrent ses grands yeux clairs de montagnard, habitués aux horizons étroits des gorges de l'Auvergne (p. 331).

He was standing looking at the immense flat grey expanse of Beauce with a feeling almost of fear and a desperate melancholy that brought tears to his clear mountain-dweller's eyes, used to the narrow horizons of the gorges of Auvergne (p. 289).

Father Madeleine is a man wholly out of place, unused to and unfit for the stagnant environment of La Beauce, whose geography stands in stark opposition to the pure, sublime peaks of his native mountain region.

Furthermore, he is overwhelmed by the immoral behaviour of the peasants, 'navré de l'indifférence religieuse de ses nouveaux paroissiens, si bouleversé des commérages et des disputes continuelles des femmes, qu'il n'osait même plus les menacer de l'enfer' (p. 361; 'heartbroken at the irreligiousness of his new parishioners and so upset by the constant gossiping and squabbling of the women that he no longer even dared threaten them with hellfire', p. 316). When the new priest arrives the animalistic attitude of the peasants ignites again as they 'l'avaient senti faible, elles en abusaient jusqu'à le tyranniser dans les choses du culte' (p. 361; 'had sensed that he was weak and took advantage of him to the point of bullying him over matters concerning services', p. 316). Like wild animals that smell fear in their prey, La Beauce's peasants display their beastly characters not only in terms of their unrestrained sexual desires, but also in their total disrespect of the priest. Father Madeline is soon removed from La Beauce and returns to the mountains for which he longs deeply.

Zola's depiction of priests in a rural environment not only mirrors his anti-clerical views, but it also parallels the weak and unsuccessful attempts that the Church made in an

attempt to reacquire its influence in the rural parts of France.<sup>297</sup> In addition, the fact that La Beauce crushes two priests highlights the idea that religion cannot take root in the region. I see this also as a consequence of the transregional and transnational nature of Catholicism clashing with the self-centred worldview of La Beauce. It appears that for Zola, the only possible religion in *La Terre* is a ferocious, primitive cult of the land, which, as we have seen, is loved and feared as a powerful, vindictive force.

In conclusion, through the representation of a disengaged family system, Zola depicts a rural society that not only discloses disinterest between family members, as we claimed in the previous chapter, but also a profound economic and political individualism. This is evident in the region's marked closure towards external politics, both national and international, and its community's profound distrust *a priori* towards people who were not born in the region or belong to a different social class, respectively Jean and Hourdequin. Such a society therefore aims to maintain the unchangeable pre-established milieu and to support an overall indifference towards everything that does not concern the region either politically, economically or socially. However, if the region's primary purpose is to defend its traditional homeostasis, national matters and nineteenth-century historical changes do not appear to be completely estranged therefrom. Themes of war and communism fight their way into the regional environment influencing to some extent its decision-making. Similarly to his urban novels, Zola in *La Terre* exposes the faults of capitalism in nineteenth-century France through his depiction of La Beauce's community as tainted by corruption, human debasement, amorality and alienation. Through the representation of such a social and economic system, the author proves how, regardless of urban or rural environment, the modern man is the victim of a profound individualism produced by the advent of capitalism.

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<sup>297</sup> Magraw, *France 1800-1914*, p. 163.

### Egdon Heath and the Return to a Primitive Society

Following the structure through which I investigated the socio-political and economic aspects of the dysfunctional regional system in Zola, I will now analyse the representation of Egdon Heath in *The Return of the Native*. Similarly to Zola's novel, *The Return of the Native* introduces in its opening pages a road that will have important implications for the development of the plot:

With the exception of an aged highway, and a still more aged barrow presently to be referred to – themselves almost crystallised to natural products by long continuance – even the trifling irregularities were not caused by pickaxe, plough, or spade, but remained as the very finger-touches of the last geological change. The above-mentioned highway traversed the lower levels of the heath, from one horizon to another (p. 12).

Comparably to *La Terre*, we find here a solitary old highway and a barrow whose surface time had only scraped faintly. In addition, the presence of this crystallised highway together with the vast and colourless aspect of the heath, as Hardy writes 'the spot was, indeed, a near relation of night' (p. 9), confer to the region a sense of permanence which renders Egdon, according to Ken Ireland, 'atemporal'.<sup>298</sup> This stillness, we can hypothesise, seems to reflect the rigidly closed boundaries of Egdon's community we have studied in Chapter Two. These aimed to keep the status quo of the region intact, therefore not allowing anything different or new to unbalance its pre-established equilibrium. As in *La Terre*, the road does not connect

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<sup>298</sup> Ken Ireland, *Thomas Hardy, Time and Narrative* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 71.

Egdon with the rest of the nation but traverses the region from one horizon to another (north-south) and ends within the region's boundaries.<sup>299</sup> Scholar Simon Gatrell claims that in depicting Egdon Heath, one of Hardy's greater achievements is 'to persuade the reader on the one hand that Egdon is vast, while on the other showing us characters walking from one side of the heath to the other in a couple of hours'.<sup>300</sup> No cities or buildings are mentioned, only the lifeless and still earth, which appears almost abstract. It comes as no surprise, then, that the stillness of the land anticipates the absence of a national economy and the presence of a microscopic one consisting of furze-cutting and inn-keeping. In effect, unlike the road in *La Terre*, this highway does not even seem to be used for a local trade, as the author does not mention a market day or products exchange between the different hamlets that constitute Egdon. Except for a mention in the first and second chapters of the novel, the road does not seem to be named anymore, as the characters tend to move around the heath via 'tracks' (p. 34), smaller and more intimate pathways through the territory which seem to enhance the entanglement of the characters inside the region.<sup>301</sup> As Patricia McKee observes, 'Egdon Heath is not connected to other parts of the country by a centralised government or economy', and, for this reason, Gatrell claims Egdon almost resembles an 'island'.<sup>302</sup> Similarly to Zola, Hardy presents a region that is both politically and economically secluded from the nation as

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<sup>299</sup> On mapping the road in Egdon Heath see Andrew Enstice, *Thomas Hardy: Landscapes of the Mind* (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 74.

<sup>300</sup> Gatrell, *Thomas Hardy Writing Dress*, p. 214.

<sup>301</sup> Sumner, *Thomas Hardy: Psychological Novelist*, p. 106. Gatrell, *Thomas Hardy and the Proper Study of Mankind*, p. 42.

<sup>302</sup> Patricia McKee, *Public and Private: Gender, Class and The British Novel (1764-1878)* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 191. Gatrell, *Thomas Hardy and the Proper Study of Mankind*, p. 43.

a whole. The closure that the author's unused road symbolises seems different from the one discovered in Zola. In *La Terre*, for instance, the road connects the different villages of La Beauce without venturing beyond its borders but this closure is the result of the community's disengagement and disinterest towards the world outside. In fact, the old road that Zola depicts serves the traditional local economy, while the new road symbolises a burgeoning capitalist spirit, which, as we have seen, fails to change the status quo in the region. In Hardy we hear of no plan to replace or modernise the 'aged highway'. Egdon is a territory crystallised in time, preserving its mythological appearance since the 'last geological change'.

In contrast to Zola's objective depiction of the cultivated fields of La Beauce, Hardy's representation of Egdon at the start of the novel is more evocative, mythological and almost fantastic. This age-old geologic formation has a mysterious, menacing aura: 'Every night its Titanic form seemed to await something; but it had waited thus, unmoved, during so many centuries, through the crises of so many things, that it could only be imagined to await one last crisis – the final overthrow' (p. 10). We can perceive an apparent sense of timelessness and stagnation.<sup>303</sup> In fact, the Titan figure, in classical mythology a giant who had rebelled against the gods and was imprisoned in the abyss Tartarus, evokes a pre-Christian, mythical time which leads us to interpret Egdon as a space outside modernity. Furthermore, it has not adopted Greenwich Mean Time: 'On Egdon there was no absolute hour of the day. The time at any moment was a number of varying doctrines professed by the different hamlets' (p. 127).

The lack of precise, universal timekeeping reflects how the people of Egdon live immersed in an existential, embodied experience of time based on concrete manifestations of

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<sup>303</sup> Anne Alexander, *Thomas Hardy: The 'Dream-Country' of his Fiction* (London: Vision Press, 1987), p. 134.



change: the movements of the sun, the seasonal cycle, the passing of generations. In opposition to what happens in urban centres, where time is conventionally determined by the chimes of the clock, time in Hardy's region appears stretched and slow to the point that, from the quote, we have the impression that it never passes. This geological time, however, only gives the deceptive sense of sameness and immutability. In fact, the presence of the Titan that we found earlier on, whose strength appears dormant and in check, can be interpreted as a threat that can awake and manifest itself at any point. This idea of impending threat and danger pervades the entire novel and, as we shall see, tragically concretises towards those characters who do not accept and instead try to rebel against this organic dimension of time.<sup>304</sup> As we claimed in Chapter Two Hardy's characters are immersed in a region that moves and determines their actions. They are guided by a deterministic fatalism, which leads them to live an already established life.

If we now zoom in to focus on the characters of the novel, we can determine whether Egdon is isolated from modernity and economic evolution, and whether the enmeshment typical of *The Return of the Native*'s family systems is present also in its attitude towards political and social matters. Richard Brinkley has claimed in fact that Hardy chose the regional novel genre not solely to draw attention on the peculiarities of a certain area, but principally to 'express his own view of human life through detailed consideration of the life of that area'.<sup>305</sup> Comparably to the evening in La Toussaint around the fire in *La Terre*, in Hardy's novel the regional community is introduced in a similar scene taking place on 5th November. Here, the author presents the lowest rank of society on Egdon Heath: the furze-

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<sup>304</sup> On Hardy's 'doom-ridden plots' see George Levine, *Reading Thomas Hardy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 2.

<sup>305</sup> Richard Brinkley, *Thomas Hardy as a Regional Novelist, with Special Reference to the 'Return of the Native'* (Guernsey: The Toucan Press, 1969), p. 158.

cutters. As with Zola's peasants, the Egdonites obliquely touch on themes of a political nature in their animated conversation around the fire. First, when the furze-cutters are commenting on how Wildevé's education to become an engineer was 'no use to him at all' (p. 26), as he now works as an inn-keeper, the peasant Humphrey ironically remarks on 'what a polish the world have been brought to' (p. 26) thanks to education. We can hypothesise that the furze-cutters are referring to the numerous acts promulgated in early nineteenth-century Britain to promote education, such as the establishment of the so-called Ragged Schools, which provided free education to children.<sup>306</sup> From this passage it appears clear how, although from a territorial point of view Egdon appears as a secluded and politically and economically impenetrable mythical world on its own, the social reformations and changes that characterised the Victorian society of Great Britain as a whole, are reflected in the region's microcosm.

The second moment during the Bonfire Night passage where the furze-cutters mention the world outside Egdon, is when Grandfer Cantle says he was a soldier in the 'Bang-up Locals' (p. 26), a force of volunteers formed to protect England from a feared invasion by Napoleon. The furze-cutter claims 'Why, afore I went a soldier in the Bang-up Locals, I didn't know no more what the world was like than the commonest man among ye. And now, jown it all, I won't say what I bain't fit for hey?' (p. 26). Grandfer Cantle's phrase seems to assert that it is thanks to his 'military career', and therefore to his exit from Egdon, that he was able to learn about the world and that now, thanks to this experience, nothing escapes him. However, unlike Jean in *La Terre*, who narrates his war experience by including it into a nationalistic frame, Grandfer Cantle's statement does not seem to disclose any breath of nationalistic sentiments. Instead, from the quote, we can deduce that he does not feel the need

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<sup>306</sup> James Walvin, *A Child's World: A Social History of English Childhood 1800-1914* (London: Pelican, 1982), p. 65.

to describe or to share with his rural community this knowledge he claims to have acquired beyond his native region.

Grandfer Cattle seems to wish to keep the war outside of himself and of the region, in an even more removed past time than the one in which he currently lives. Paraphrasing Jane Mattisson, a person who has left the heath must, upon returning, abandon the notions gained outside and ‘submit to the demands and the limitation of the heath itself’.<sup>307</sup> In fact, Grandfer Cattle, after his military experience outside, returned into Egdon’s macrocosm, covering the pivotal role of furze-cutter in the rustic chorus, namely talking in dialect. He therefore returned to a life before the learning, namely a primordial type of life, so dear – as we shall see – to Hardy. Once again, the furze-cutters, like Zola’s peasants, discuss war from the level of personal history and experience, missing the bigger picture of an event which involves an entire nation and not a single individual. We can argue that the outside nation, and consequently the rest of the world, their political changes and economic developments, only echo in the boundaries of Egdon Heath’s community, which, as we already claimed from a territorial point of view appears politically and economically impermeable. This idea is supported further if we bear in mind that, according to Trish Ferguson, during the 1830s, Bonfire Night became an occasion for regional labourers to express their discontent and violence at their economic conditions.<sup>308</sup> Here, instead the furze-cutters discuss themes, events and people within the region, focusing especially on the burden that is going to church on a Sunday.

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<sup>307</sup> Jane Mattisson, *Knowledge and Survival in the Novels of Thomas Hardy* (Lund: Lund University, 2002), p. 241.

<sup>308</sup> Trish Ferguson, ‘Bonfire Night in Thomas Hardy’s *The Return of the Native*’, *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 67 (2012), 87-107 (p. 94).

Not unlike Zola, Hardy appears intent on debunking the idyllic myth of the God-fearing and church-going peasants typical of regional literature. The furze-cutters attend church once every three years, as Humphrey claims ‘I’m so dead sleepy of a Sunday; and ‘tis so terrible far to get there’ (p. 24), or when they do, it is an exceptional circumstance: ‘Ah, well, I was at church that day’ said Fairway, ‘which was a very curious thing to happen’ (p. 24). Joseph Hillis has claimed that since Christianity in Egdon appears to be only nominal, the church no longer functions ‘as a social gathering place for all classes and levels of this community’.<sup>309</sup> If this idea underlines and focuses on the implicit distinction Hardy makes between furze-cutters and the genteel protagonists, which we shall analyse in more detail later on, Hillis however does not seem to propose a convincing interpretation of the reasons behind the villagers’ avoidance of the Church. I would argue that the furze-cutters appear intrinsically used to the life they live year after year, and are unable even to fathom that a different reality might exist, not even in Heaven. This is clear in Humphrey’s words: ‘When you do get [to church], ‘tis such a mortal poor chance that you’ll be chosen for up above, that I bide home and don’t go at all’ (p. 24). Their indifference to ‘Christianity’s central idea of eternal salvation’ appears to be the reason why they do not go to church to pray, in order to cleanse their souls.<sup>310</sup> Instead, they prefer to clean and groom their bodies by having their hair cut by Fairway, ‘the victim sitting on a chopping-block in front of the house, without a coat and the neighbours gossiping around [...]’ (p. 167). The furze-cutters appear to dedicate themselves to a more concrete and immediately gratifying existence rather than strive towards cultivating hope for an eternal gratification. Interestingly, Anne Mickelson argues that ‘in an age of great emphasis on Sunday piety, Egdon Heath’s rustics view Sunday not as a day for

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<sup>309</sup> Miller, *Communities in Fiction*, p. 118.

<sup>310</sup> Cf. Jan Jędrzejewski, *Thomas Hardy and the Church* (London: Macmillan, 1996), p. 92.

religion, but for shaves and swapping stories'.<sup>311</sup> This seems similar to the presence of the menacing Titan we discussed at the beginning of this section. In fact in Humphrey's words 'tis such a mortal poor chance that you'll be chosen for up above', the author emphasises once again the presence of a supernatural force indifferent to the individual's destiny. Again, similarly to what we claimed for Zola's novel, we can hypothesise that religion cannot enter an enmeshed environment preserved in a mythical, pre-Christian era. In such a setting in fact, the furze-cutters actually place their faith in superstitions and ancient popular beliefs, and a proper religious creed does not appear to be able to develop. Robert Schweik claims that 'Hardy from time to time portrayed Christianity as a transient and ineffectual creed based on dubious legends no longer believed'.<sup>312</sup>

If Christianity is on the wane, popular beliefs and superstition have not lost their grip on the local people.<sup>313</sup> Christian Cantle, Grandfer Cantle's son, is a weak and scared man who cannot find a wife because he is not masculine. He is told the reason behind his bachelor status is the fact that he was born on a night with no moon and no moon means 'no man' (p. 29). Master Fairway also adds 'You'll have to lie alone all your life; and 'tis not to married couples but to single sleepers that a ghost shows himself' (p. 29), which plainly terrifies poor Christian. Witchcraft and voodoo magic are rife in Egdon: one of the women, convinced that

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<sup>311</sup> Anne Mickelson, *Thomas Hardy's Women and Men: The Defeat of Nature* (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, 1976), p. 7.

<sup>312</sup> Schweik, 'The Influence of Religion', p. 57.

<sup>313</sup> Cf. concept of 'Paganism' in Tom Spenser, *Thomas Hardy: The Tragic Novels* (Kidderminster: Crescent Moon Publishing, 1993), p. 98. Lennart Björk, *Psychological Vision and Social Criticism in the Novels of Thomas Hardy* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1987), p. 133.

Eustacia has bewitched her son, makes a wax effigy of her, takes ‘a paper of pins and [begins] to thrust into the image in all directions, with apparently excruciating energy’ (p. 343). Hardy represents a region so ensnared in its ancient beliefs and traditions that Christianity is no more than ‘a transient and ineffectual creed’ for its inhabitants.

Despite some similarities, *La Terre* and *The Return of the Native* paint profoundly different images of the farming community. The bitterness, hatred and egoism which we encountered in the passage in Old Fouan’s shed are not present in the furze-cutters of Bonfire Night. Hardy’s landworkers in this passage, as in any other moment in the novel appear content and enjoying the night as Mr Fairway claims ‘Christian lift up your spirits like a man! Susy, dear, you and I will have a jig – hey, my honey? – before ‘tis quite too dark to see how well-favoured you be still’ (p. 32). Although the furze-cutters, as the peasants in Zola, carry out repetitive work on the land, ‘summer and winter the scene was the same’ (p. 167), they do not seem to share the same murderous individualism and animalistic attitudes as Zola’s peasants. Instead, they tend to work in harmony, everyone placed at the same level, and there is no hierarchy of landowner and labourer. Furthermore, throughout *The Return of the Native* there is no mention of land ownership, capitalist, or Marxist wage-labourer, because capitalism seems absent in Egdon Heath, and as Joseph Hillis Miller reports ‘they work cooperatively together. No one is in charge or gives orders’.<sup>314</sup> This aspect seems to have a twofold cause. The first is linked to a more psychodynamic interpretation in that the Egdonites work cooperatively due to the fact that even though the region is enmeshed in itself, and its political and economic crystallisation does not allow the entrance of modernity and evolution through its boundaries, such a closed environment prevents its community from being infected by that ‘agricultural capitalism’ that characterised *La Terre*.<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>314</sup> Miller, *Communities in Fiction*, p. 115.

<sup>315</sup> Marx, *Capital*, p. 294. Miller, *Communities in Fiction*, p. 114.

The second cause derives from Hardy's own political and ideological beliefs. As we shall see in the endings he reserves for his genteel characters, the author appears firmly convinced by the integrity and purity of the rural community. He depicts the Egdonites untouched by capitalism strikingly opposing the Victorian era of great industrial development, where man believed he could change his status and life with his own strength in order to achieve a selfish, ephemeral and material form of comfort. Moreover, as we claimed in Chapter Two and earlier on here, for Hardy man is not in control of his own life. Instead, it is what we defined as *pater familias*, or Hardy's dormant Titan that dictates with cruel indifference the fate of every character.

However, what seems present here, which was lacking in *La Terre*, is a focus on class mobility. Although we claimed that Egdon appears to be politically and economically impermeable to national changes, it still presents traits of the social modifications typical of nineteenth-century Europe and, more specifically, Britain. Therefore, the region is not depicted as completely segregated from dynamic developments through time and historical changes. If in Zola the only social class we discovered was the peasant, in *The Return of the Native* – already from the Bonfire Night passage – we can detect two different social classes: the furze-cutters and the people they gossip about, such as the 'genteel' (p. 35) Mrs Yeobright, Eustacia, Clym Yeobright and Wildeve.<sup>316</sup> The threshold between social classes in the eyes of the furze-cutters seems to be ascribable to education and place of birth, rather than to aristocratic heritage. In fact, as discussed later, the genteel individuals are not born to noble origins, but, contrary to the furze-cutters, received a proper education, symbol, at the time, of social elevation. Furthermore, unlike the rustic chorus, which was born and bred in Egdon, the genteel characters come from some distance away, so they are not natives (Wildeve and Eustacia), or have spent time outside the region, therefore becoming strangers to it (Clym).

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<sup>316</sup> Levine, *Reading Thomas Hardy*, p. 6.

Throughout the novel, there appears to be class separation; Hardy tends to alternate passages dedicated to the heath and its workers, to others focused mainly on the protagonists. When the educated and furze-cutters meet in the novel, it is often accidental and cut short by the former. In fact, the educated Mrs Yeobright, Wildeve, Clym and Eustacia, indirectly underline this class differentiation in their rapport with the furze-cutters, who, during Bonfire Night, are enjoying a night on the heath, when Mrs Yeobright suddenly makes an appearance. Up until this moment, they had been speaking in dialect, which Hardy renders through contractions ('d'ye' for 'do you' and 'twill' for 'it will') and ungrammatical phrases such as the infinitive 'I be he' (meaning 'I am the one'). When Mrs Yeobright appears on the scene, however, their language changes, in that the furze-cutters do not contract words as strongly as before, and they attempt to speak 'correctly' to her. In an attempt to distance himself from his boisterous father, Christian tells her 'A harrowing old man, Mis'ess Yeobright. I wouldn't live with him a week, so playward as he is, if I could get away' (p. 36). The change in the furze-cutters' language highlights the social gap between heath workers and Mrs Yeobright, which is also clear in her rigid and cold attitude towards them. Betraying her complete disinterest in what they are saying, she brusquely cuts the conversation short, stating 'I am sorry to stop the talk, but I must be leaving you now' (p. 36).

Such a distance between the main protagonists and what Trish Ferguson calls the 'rustic chorus' of the land workers is evident in another moment when, in the following chapter, we see the furze-cutters gathering outside the Quiet Woman Inn to congratulate what they believe to be the newly-wed Wildeve and Thomasin Yeobright and sing the traditional welcome song.<sup>317</sup> Before opening the door to them, Wildeve crossly tells Thomasin, who is still not his bride, to hide in the back room 'I'll manage them. Blundering fools!' (p. 48). And when Grandfer Cattle is about to sing the second song, Wildeve interrupts him with 'Thank

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<sup>317</sup> Ferguson, 'Bonfire Night', p. 100.



you, Grandfer, but we will not trouble you now. Some other day must do for that – when I have a party’ (p. 52). With the words ‘blundering fools’ and the abrupt interruption of the song Wildeve, although to some extent embarrassed and feeling guilty at the fact he is still unmarried, shows an attitude of superiority towards the furze-cutters. Even though he is the keeper of the Quiet Woman Inn, a job that in the collective imaginary belongs typically to the regional world, Wildeve does not show a sense of belonging to the regional community in which he resides, as he calls its members ‘creatures’ (p. 228), i.e. not even human beings, and a ‘plague’ (p. 228). Being an educated townman, and so a stranger to Egdon, Wildeve considers himself as different from the furze-cutters, and so by calling them a plague, he shows his upper-class distaste for them.

The same patronising attitude is highlighted in Eustacia Vye and in her treatment of the heath folk. This is especially true of her behaviour towards Johnny, the little boy whom she instructs to keep the bonfire lit to signal to Wildeve she is available to receive him. She reprimands Johnny who is tired of guarding the fire, ‘Ungrateful little boy, how can you contradict me? Never shall you have a bonfire again unless you keep it up now. Come, tell me you like to do things for me, and don’t deny it’ (p. 59). Her abusive and unkind words towards the boy resemble those of an evil queen towards her servants. Eustacia, as we shall analyse later, is actually ‘queen of night’ (p. 68) and treats everyone whom she sees as her social inferior with the utmost contempt. This is enhanced further if we bear in mind that she lives on the barrow, a tall, solitary hill on the heath. This place, which is elevated from the actual region, appears to underline Eustacia’s own detachment from the heath folk, and not only is she not a native of Egdon, but she also lives ‘above’ everyone and spies on them with a ‘telescope’ (p. 56) in an attitude of control. What appears interesting is that a barrow is also an ancient heap of earth or stones covering the remains of the dead. This funerary connotation of the place where Eustacia lives seems in a way to foreshadow the fatal ending which awaits

her. Once again here, similarly to Wildeva, the difference between her and the furze-cutters is that she is an outsider of the rural community, as she was born in Budmouth and she was able to have an education thanks to her grandfather. But as for her partner in crime, Eustacia's show of superiority is in fact a pretence and projection of personality rather than reality: we are told that her father was a mere bandmaster with the regiment quartered at Budmouth 'whose pockets were as light as his occupation' (p. 68) and having drunk himself to death, had left his daughter penniless.

A further character through which the gap between social classes is underlined is Clym Yeobright, who returns to the Heath after having worked in Paris as a diamond trader, to open – as we reported earlier – a school to educate 'the poor and ignorant' (p. 172). His view is idealistic and patronising, as he seems to regard the heath folk as little children who need to elevate themselves.<sup>318</sup> By stating 'Tis good-hearted of the young man. But, for my part, I think he had better mind his business' (p. 169), it appears clear how the furze-cutters feel no need for this kind of education. We can hypothesise, in fact, that in a life made of identical and repetitive furze-cutting, education for the peasants embodies change, progress and evolution, which involuntarily but understandably threaten the mythical, static, ancient reality of the heath, thereby rendering it more similar to the urban environment from which they wish to remain separate.

Finally, similarly to the other 'genteel' characters of the novel, in his encounters with the furze-cutters Clym is prone to cut the conversation short with a 'now, neighbours, I must go' (p. 169). These examples of the distancing between the furze-cutters and the main protagonist of the novel lead us to identify, contrary to *La Terre*, the presence in Egdon of different social classes. Furthermore, from Mrs Yeobright's and Clym's words 'I am sorry to

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<sup>318</sup> Clym as the problem of the modern man in a rural society in Sumner, *Thomas Hardy: Psychological Novelist*, p. 107.

stop the talk, but I must be leaving you now' (p. 36) and 'now, neighbours, I must go' (p. 169) we seem to individuate the concept of a different sense of time and a consequently different pace of life perceived by the two classes: for the genteel group life's rhythm is quick, busy and always proceeding, similar to how it would be in industrialised urban centres, while the furze-cutters' and the locals' view appears profoundly linked to the pace of the land and is slower, stretched out and calmer. By highlighting the division between rustic folk and genteel people, Thomas Hardy aimed to represent how, even in such an enmeshed regional microcosm, there is a reflection of nineteenth-century national British society. The depiction of the three characters re-entering the rural space of Egdon from an urban environment, Clym from Paris, Wildeve and Eustacia from Budmouth, and the fate that we shall see is reserved for them, reinforces the idea that there should be no relations between the inside and the outside; everything must happen within the regional system's boundaries and must be contained. Hardy in this regard seems to support the idea of a 'pure', rural way of living uncontaminated by external influences.

The social mobility characterising the Victorian Era generated new hopes and anxieties about the 'volatilities of class position' and the concrete idea that even the poorest man could become self-made and wealthy, just as much as the most opulent one could end up in the debtors' prison.<sup>319</sup> The theme of self-amelioration and personal realisation is common to many nineteenth-century authors and often goes hand-in-hand with an emphasis on patriarchal family values and the home as safe place for the individual. Lois Bethe Schoenfeld claims 'the Victorian ideology of the family presented a patriarchal father who worked, then his wages would support the family – just as a woman in the home would nurture the

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<sup>319</sup> Penny Boumelha, 'The Patriarchy of Class: *Under the Greenwood Tree, Far From the Madding Crowd, The Woodlanders*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Hardy*, ed. by Kramer, pp. 130-144 (p. 133).

family’.<sup>320</sup> Against this social background, *The Return of the Native* seems to question Victorian ideas of social progress and domesticity by showing downward instead of upward mobility, and tragic flaws instead of self-improvement. In addition, this representation of dysfunctional family systems, as seen in Chapter Two, includes weak or absent men and strong females, thus contravening Victorian assumptions regarding gender roles. Schoenfeld claims that in Hardy’s families we find ‘an exposition of the results of the historical and cultural changes of nineteenth century’.<sup>321</sup> We can actually argue that Hardy exposes the negative consequences of the excessive social disruption of nineteenth-century Britain mirrored in the microcosm of Egdon Heath, through the two male characters at the centre of the plot: Wildeve and Clym.

As seen above, Wildeve had studied in Budmouth to become an engineer, but instead of prospering in that line of employment, he had returned to the heath to manage the Quiet Woman Inn. The reason behind this change of employment lies probably in his passion for women, or, as he defines it, in his ‘inflammability’ (p. 63), particularly in relation to Eustacia, to whom he had been attached since his years at Budmouth. It is for her sake that, he claims, he has accepted the declassing ‘from engineering to innkeeping’ (p. 63), thus forsaking bourgeois ambitions. His indecisive and fickle nature becomes evident in the muddle between Thomasin, Eustacia and himself, which he creates by trying to juggle relationships with two women at the same time. Just as he learns that Thomasin might accept the marriage proposal of another man, he receives a break-up letter from Eustacia. The narrator comments ‘to lose the two women – he who had been the well-beloved of both – was too ironical an issue to be endured’ (p. 150). A selfish, superficial character, Wildeve worries only about appearances and has no inclination for settled, domestic life. As we saw in Chapter Two, the new unit he

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<sup>320</sup> Schoenfeld, *Dysfunctional Families*, p. 27.

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

forms with Thomasin, when he finally agrees to marry her, lacks any cohesion and solidity, and he fails to discharge even the most basic duty to provide for his wife.

From a social point of view, Hardy seems to depict the overturning of the typical Victorian family by making Mrs Yeobright send money to Thomasin. In other words, the author presents a family system wherein the husband who should be a pivotal figure, is weak, does not fulfil his patriarchal responsibilities and deceives his wife. As we claimed in the previous chapter, Wildeve is rarely described with his wife in the novel. Furthermore, it is a woman, Mrs Yeobright, who amends Wildeve's failings as a husband. This representation of weak and uncommitted men seems to agree with Lois Schoenfeld's idea claiming that Hardy believed that the solely 'male-dominated type of family structure was unsatisfactory, which is why there are so few in his narratives'.<sup>322</sup> Furthermore, Wildeve not only falls short of his expected role, but also manipulates the very patriarchal values he is violating, using them to justify his attempt to intercept the money Mrs Yeobright sends her niece. He talks the gullible Christian Cantle, who acts as the go-between, into handing him the money, arguing 'Why doesn't that which belongs to the wife belong to the husband too?' (p. 218).

This 'rule', however is only unilateral because as soon as Wildeve inherits the money from his Canadian uncle, he does not think of sharing it with his wife, but wishes to elope with Eustacia. However as we have already claimed, change in an enmeshed environment which aims to keep everyone fixed in their roles cannot take place, and Wildeve drowns before reaching the outer borders of the region. It is possible to grasp the implicit moral connotation of the event if we interpret Wildeve as a carrier of urban values; his death appears as the uprooting of an agent poisoning the mythical and organic aspects of the region. Although class mobility is present in the microcosm, this instead of socially improving individuals, seems to declass them to their original standing of regional folk. Forbidding

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<sup>322</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

Wildeve from leaving the region and elevating his social condition produces to an extent an equalisation of class differentiation, which is coherent with my psychodynamic analysis of the region in Chapter Two. His death accordingly seems to represent a solution in order to eradicate the issue and reconstruct a functional system: from the level of the microcosm the native Thomasin is freed from an unhappy and dysfunctional marriage and is able to reconstruct a functional one with the native Diggory Venn; from the level of the macrocosm with Wildeve's death, the homeostasis of the region remains intact, and its native society remains homogenous with no class differentiation. This follows my psychodynamic interpretation of the entangled Egdon, where members' hierarchical roles are almost non-existent.<sup>323</sup> Once again, Hardy seems to demonstrate his wish to safeguard the harmony and integrity of this rural world by removing, through Wildeve's death, the threat of corruption.

The other man whose psychosocial regression can be reflected in his class mobility is Clym Yeobright. Interestingly, Hardy does not give a negative connotation to this descent down the social ladder. In fact, as we shall see, Clym, by becoming a furze-cutter, returns also to a kind of life which, for the author, embodies purity and integrity. When he returns home we can argue that he also returns to occupy the elevated social position, which he already held prior to his departure for Paris, as the son of a small landowner. He marries Eustacia, whom he believes to be 'a lady by instinct' (p. 199) and not by social standing, and he dreams of setting up a school where together they will educate the lower classes. However, Clym's intensive studies strain his eyesight and he becomes almost blind. We can interpret this disability as a device for Hardy to stop Clym from providing an education to the Egdonites and consequently from paving the way for modernity. Paraphrasing Jacqueline Dillion, Hardy does not allow Clym's 'radical reform' to enlighten the rural community to concretise, as it is

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<sup>323</sup> Cf. Chapter Two, section 'Rebellious Wanderings in *The Return of the Native*'.

a menace to the slow-paced geological time of Egdon.<sup>324</sup> Therefore, in order to provide for his wife, Clym chooses to work as a furze-cutter – a trajectory blatantly opposed to the search for social amelioration and personal ambition sanctioned by Victorian norms. He moves from zenith to nadir, from diamond trader in luxurious Paris, to worn-out furze-cutter. Furthermore, he is an ‘invalid’ (p. 241), and somewhat drags his ‘educated lady-wife’ (p. 245) down with him in his social demise. So, instead of taking her to Paris and elevating her to the ladylike status she covets, Clym arranges for them to live humbly in a little cottage in ‘absolute seclusion’ (p. 203). Paraphrasing Schoenfeld, through the weakness of Clym’s role, Hardy actually doubts the social paternalism as an acceptable ideology in Victorian Britain.<sup>325</sup>

However, unlike Wildeve, who resents his position as humble innkeeper, Clym seems to find a sort of solace in working as a furze-cutter: ‘The monotony of his occupation soothed him, and was in itself a pleasure’, Hardy explains, ‘hence Yeobright sometimes sang to himself’ (p. 245). This image of serenity in nature contrasts strongly to Clym’s ‘flashy business’ in Paris, which he had come to hate (p. 173). Unlike Wildeve, Clym returns to his native, regional social condition of his own volition and finds his own path to self-realisation within it, also abandoning the quick-paced rhythm of life he had acquired in Paris. When his wife tells him that his work is degrading he in fact claims ‘the more I see of life, the more do I perceive that there is nothing particularly great in its greatest walks, and therefore nothing particularly small in mine of furze-cutting’ (p. 247). These words can sound deeply subversive, because instead of promoting the concept of social ascent, they give force to a vision of life linked to chance and according to which one must accept and submit to the fate received, without the wish to change it. For this reason, Clym in part becomes the spokesman

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<sup>324</sup> Jacqueline Dillion, *Thomas Hardy: Folklore and Resistance* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 132.

<sup>325</sup> Schoenfeld, *Dysfunctional Families*, p. 31.

of Hardy. Against the radical social differences brought about by modern industrialisation and capitalism, Hardy offers a vision of the locale proposing a return to an ancient, simpler way of life. That this is the right path is unequivocally signalled by the fact that Clym's life is spared when he tries to save Eustacia, while she and Wildeve drown in the river. At the end of the novel, Clym finds his vocation and becomes an open-air preacher delivering sermons on 'morally unimpeachable subjects' (p. 396). In this guise, he is absorbed back into Egdon's society and can be heard 'speaking in simple language on Rainbarrow' (p. 389). Through the titular character Clym, Hardy appears to support an idea of the regional world as pre-modern, simple and egalitarian, without extreme disparities between classes, criticising the 'glittering splendours and titled libertines' (p. 173) of cities such as Paris.

Furthermore, the author presents a complex and largely sympathetic representation of strong women living in a secluded and fixed environment, and yet, his female characters are subjected to the same inflexible social and physical circumstances that determine the men's fate. Eustacia Vye is probably the most ambivalent and fascinating character in the novel. On the one hand, she is lazy and spoilt, 'of no use to herself or to other people' (p. 176), 'an adolescent dreamer' as Rosemary Sumner has defined her, which can be seen in the passage where Diggory suggests she goes back to Budmouth to work for a lady so that she can escape the tedious heath.<sup>326</sup> She responds 'I knew it meant work. It is to wear myself out to please her! And I won't go!' (p. 92). On the other hand, she embodies rebellion and revolution in an ancient, immobile and unchanging region, in deep contrast to the meek Thomasin, who mostly keeps to the house, waiting for her husband to return. The first time we meet Eustacia, she appears standing unafraid on the dark barrow of the heath next to her bonfire: 'a closely wrapped female figure [...] tall and straight in build [...] stood still, around her stretching the vast night atmosphere' (p. 54). She is a woman with a goal – she wants to escape from Egdon

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<sup>326</sup> Sumner, *Thomas Hardy: Psychological Novelist*, p. 103.



and go to Paris. Of course, it is no coincidence that it is in fact Paris, the city of revolution, that Eustacia chooses as her dream destination and not, for example, the much closer London.<sup>327</sup>

Anne Mickelson claims that ‘Hardy is one of the first Victorian writers to face the issue of the rebel woman in society’ and in fact Eustacia lives on the heath with a hunger for emancipation, that is to fight and conquer her environment and to escape.<sup>328</sup> The high-spirited Eustacia recognises the authority of no man; her kind but inattentive grandfather has no power over her and she comes and goes as she pleases, often roaming the heath alone. This leads a shocked Mrs Yeobright to wonder ‘Why doesn’t he look after her?’ (p. 203). The furze-cutters observe her wanderings with unease, commenting that ‘No lady would rove about the heath at all hours of the day and night as she does’ (p. 199). But Eustacia takes no notice of the almost universal disapproval: her determination to escape the boredom of her life on the heath and its slow passing of time trumps every other concern.

Significantly, her interest in Clym Yeobright is sparked well before she meets him, when she hears from the furze-cutters’ gossip that he lives in Paris. Immediately, she hatches a plan to seduce him, ‘to divert him back to Paris’, and make her escape from Egdon.<sup>329</sup> Hardy reveals that her passionate nature is also capable of strategic, cold-blooded design: ‘she seldom schemed, but when she did scheme, her plans showed rather the comprehensive strategy of a general’ (p. 71). In one of the most famous scenes in the novel, she convinces

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<sup>327</sup> On Eustacia as a small-scale ‘social reformer’ see Ferguson, ‘Bonfire Night’, p. 91.

<sup>328</sup> Mickelson, *Thomas Hardy’s Women and Men*, p. 79.

<sup>329</sup> Rosemarie Morgan, *Women and Sexuality in the Novels of Thomas Hardy* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 76.

one of the furze-cutters to switch places at the mumming performance and sneaks into Mrs Yeobright's Christmas party in disguise.

The mumming performance, according to Robert Squillace, originates from pagan rituals during which a personification of the past year is killed and resurrected to ensure fertility in spring.<sup>330</sup> This rite was then contaminated by Christianity in the Middle Ages and turned into a Christmas ceremony showing events of the Crusades and the legend of St George.<sup>331</sup> The symbolism of the mumming play represents an early phase of the human evolution no longer accessible to man. Hardy once again, through the depiction of this 'ancient custom' seems to support indirectly the maintenance of primitive traditions and consequently a primitive life. Furthermore, events such as Bonfire Night analysed above and the mumming performance become aspects typical of a regionalist novel in that they describe an old folkloristic custom emblematic of the area in question. However, the mummers' scene does not simply present in detail a rural tradition as a manifesto for life in the region; undeniably, Hardy introduces it to give specificity and authenticity to the place protagonist of his novel. Nonetheless, he seems to use this all-male performance as a plot device to underline Eustacia's driven and passionate personality, which leads her to stop at nothing to see the man who could become embodiment of liberation from the heath. Personally, I would argue that mumming in this context acquires a double significance: on the one hand, it is an expression of ancient, rural traditions; on the other hand, it becomes a metaphor for modernity, in that it presents the profound novelty of Eustacia as a character. In the performance, Eustacia dresses as the Turkish Knight which, according to Robert Squillace, 'is representative of the luxuriant, amoral orient', and also on this occasion she contrasts with the

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<sup>330</sup> Robert Squillace, 'Hardy's Mummers', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 41 (1986), 172-189 (p. 173).

<sup>331</sup> See note 328 above.

purity and simplicity of Thomasin and of the rest of the rural community around her.<sup>332</sup> It does not surprise us, therefore, that Eustacia, a symbol of rebellion and non-conformity in Egdon, chooses to play this role in the performance.

Eustacia's bold behaviour is an all-out challenge to gender norms: she walks alone, meets men un-chaperoned, schemes 'as a general', dresses up as a knight to take part in men-only theatricals and pursues someone for his social standing, claiming the same freedom which belonged in the nineteenth century exclusively to men.<sup>333</sup> Although marriage in the nineteenth century was a 'woman's finite role', through Eustacia it seems to become a tool for freedom, to realise one's own ambitions.<sup>334</sup> Not once in the novel does she talk about motherhood or children with Clym, as her desire is not to play the angel of the household, but to fulfil her ambition of leaving the prison-like region. This desire consumes her and means more to her than life itself: 'O, if I could live in a gay town as a lady should, and go my own ways, and do my own things, I'd give the wrinkled half of my life!' (p. 92). Tragically for her, Eustacia's plans do not come to fruition, and it soon becomes clear that Clym will take her neither to Paris nor to Budmouth as he promised her, and his dream of a simple life has no appeal for her. As a result, Eustacia is trapped both in an environment she loathes and in an unsatisfactory marriage. Region and marriage appear to become parallel spaces, both rigidly closed, similar to a jail where Eustacia feels restricted as a prisoner and similarly to a caged animal she paces unceasingly on the heath.<sup>335</sup> As Anne Mickelson has argued, through Eustacia, Hardy seems to foreshadow

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<sup>332</sup> Ibid., p. 180.

<sup>333</sup> Nicholson, 'The woman pays', p. 35.

<sup>334</sup> Mickelson, *Thomas Hardy's Women and Men*, p. 71.

<sup>335</sup> Marriage as 'another form of prison' in Spenser, *Thomas Hardy: The Tragic Novels*, p. 111.

The problems of many modern women – the struggle of self-realisation, the search for a place in a man's world, and the envy of a man's greater freedom. [...] Hardy's dramatization of Eustacia reinforces the idea that her lack of opportunity and her dependence on man for economic security inevitably lead her into what he sees as the marriage trap.<sup>336</sup>

When she sees Clym happily singing as he cuts furze, she cries: 'God! If I were a man in such a position I would curse rather than sing' (p. 247). Once again, these words show Eustacia's inner drive to rebel and enjoy the power and freedom that come with being a man. After realising that Clym will never move away from his furze-cutter condition on the heath, Eustacia has one last chance to fulfil her dream of escaping the region and elevating her social status: to elope with the newly wealthy Wildeve. However, this scene contrasts to the one analysed earlier, which depicts Eustacia in control of her wish to marry Clym, the symbol of her possible escape. Here, Eustacia has realised that she can never truly be the general, the helmsman of her life, and that if she wants to escape she must submit to another man, in this case Wildeve. She tells him: 'If I decide on this escape I can only meet you once more unless – I cannot go without you' (p. 330). Divided between her fiercely guarded independence and her desperate need to get away, she has no alternative but to accept Wildeve's offer, even though this signifies for Eustacia becoming the lover, which, throughout the novel, she has always denied him. However, a different finale awaits Eustacia, an ending which clearly punishes her too many ambivalent, modern and obscure characteristics. As we shall see in a moment, according to John Lucas, the tragicity of Eustacia's ending is enhanced by the idea that she is defeated by the 'social and circumstantial pressures' that throughout the novel she

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<sup>336</sup> Mickelson, *Thomas Hardy's Women and Men*, p. 68.

has heroically tried to oppose.<sup>337</sup> When Clym sends her away, having learnt about her involvement in his mother's death, she is forced to return to her grandfather's house. Alone, she looks at the pistols hanging on the wall 'which her grandfather always kept there loaded, as a precaution against burglars' (p. 322). However the patriarchal society she lives in forbids her from executing one last act of rebellion and freedom, namely suicide. In fact, Charley takes the pistols down, stating 'I could not bear to leave them in your way. There was meaning in your look at them' (p. 323). Only at the end of the novel is Eustacia able to die, as 'death, no respecter of gender, will provide the dignity lacking in life'.<sup>338</sup> Her death is nevertheless ambiguous because we are never sure whether she jumps in the river at Shadwater Weir or falls in it, as Hardy writes 'a dull sound became audible above the storm and wind. Its origin was unmistakable – it was the fall of a body into the stream in the adjoining mead' (p. 355). Therefore, according to Bruce Martin, the author fails to tell us whether to Eustacia is given the possibility of one last revolutionary act that would render her finally free from her social constriction, or whether she is passively subjected to an accidental fall.<sup>339</sup> In addition, we can argue that Eustacia dies also due to the fact that similarly to Wildeve she wants to escape the region to elevate her social status. Just like her lover, she is stopped before she is out of Egdon, as here upwards class mobility, and so social change, cannot take place. Unlike the furze-cutters, who as we saw live a content and undisturbed life and whose immutable nature enhances their sense of belonging to the crystallised region, in Egdon, Eustacia and Wildeve represent what Jonathan Bate calls 'the condition of modern

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<sup>337</sup> John Lucas, *The Literature of Change: Studies in the Nineteenth-Century Provincial Novel* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1977), p. 147.

<sup>338</sup> Mickelson, *Thomas Hardy's Women and Men*, p. 74.

<sup>339</sup> Bruce Martin, 'Whatever Happened to Eustacia Vye', *Studies in the Novel*, 4 (1972), 619-627 (p. 622).

man, with his mobility, which renders him never able to share this sense of belonging. He will always be an outsider'.<sup>340</sup> This idea is true up until the end of the novel, when Eustacia and Wildeve die. Paraphrasing Mainak Dutt, although the two lovers are outsiders in Egdon – and for this reason they repeatedly try to escape it –, they are never allowed to do so, and instead they are denied the possibility to leave because, as we claimed in Chapter Two, the regional *pater familias* does not permit their departure.<sup>341</sup> Their death on the heath, however, makes the non-natives an integral part of Egdon's soil, and therefore at the end of the novel we can hypothesise that Eustacia and Wildeve finally belong to the region and become 'natives' by returning into Egdon's maternal womb. In addition, through Eustacia's death, the author seems to solve metaphorically another aspect of social disruption: if, on the one hand weak men cannot survive in such a traditional society as Egdon, strong and independent women – synonym of modernity – must be eliminated as well.

The other woman who does not comply with Victorian feminine norms is Mrs Yeobright, a curate's daughter, who 'married down', as she is the widow of a small farmer. Keen on marking her social superiority, she keeps the villagers at a distance and has high expectations for her son and niece. Penny Boumelha claims 'Mrs Yeobright's sense of higher social possibilities – both retrospectively in her own life and marriage beneath her, and in her son's potential rise to wealth – permeates all her actions'.<sup>342</sup> Her class pretensions risk getting in the way of the young people's happiness. Not only is she displeased with Clym's decision to settle back in Egdon, but she also forbids Thomasin to marry Diggory Venn when he first

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<sup>340</sup> Jonathan Bate, 'Culture and Environment: From Austen to Hardy', *New Literary History*, 30 (1999), 541-560 (p. 554).

<sup>341</sup> Mainak Dutt, *Nature and Human Nature in Thomas Hardy* (New Delhi: Bahri Publications, 1990), p. 44.

<sup>342</sup> Boumelha, *Thomas Hardy and Women*, p. 51.

proposes to her. Thomasin candidly and somewhat resignedly writes to him, informing him that 'she will want me to look a little higher than a small dairy-farmer, and marry a professional man' (p. 79). When Clym tells her of his intention to marry Eustacia and open a school, his mother is scathing: 'I hadn't the least idea that you meant to go backward in the world by your own free choice', she tells him (p. 173). Although Mrs Yeobright is described as an ambitious, modern woman, she is still trapped in a male-dominated society which has limited her expectations and satisfactions through marriage, and had lowered her class status. Paradoxically, this makes her akin in many ways to Eustacia, whom she loathes, perhaps because she sees so well through her. Though she never openly attempts to change her class position, she indirectly does so when she projects her desires towards Thomasin and even more overtly towards Clym. For this reason, Mrs Yeobright is bitten by an adder when she is walking on the heath and dies. The fact that it is an animal on the heath that kills Mrs Yeobright underlines how profoundly the region's nature itself wants this threat to the homeostasis of its society removed at all costs.

There are, however, at least two characters who survive Hardy's narrative and are rewarded: they are Diggory Venn and Thomasin Yeobright, who remain in the background for much of the novel, obscured by the more sensational vicissitudes of Eustacia, Clym and Wildeve. Diggory is the son of a dairy-man, who chooses to take up the socially demeaning job of reddleman after Thomasin rejects him. From his marginal position at the edge of the heath, however, he is able to observe the movements and actions of all the other characters from a distance, learning their secrets and playing them against one another in an attempt to protect Thomasin. Selflessly, he breaks up Eustacia and Wildeve's liaison, so that he might be free to marry Thomasin. Diggory tells Eustacia 'I ask you – not because her right is best, but because her situation is worst – to give him up to her' (p. 90). He is also the one who tricks Wildeve into a card game to win back the money he stole from Thomasin (p. 224). Unlike

Wildeve, who is often absent in his wife's life, Diggory supervises Thomasin from his position on the heath and, in a fashion, is ever-present in her everyday life. Although Diggory is not officially Thomasin's husband, he behaves by following the norms that in Victorian Britain would define a patriarchal man. For this reason, at the end of the novel, he is the only character who undergoes upward class mobility. From reddleman he returns to Egdon, after a time of absence, as a wealthy dairy-man and no longer red, 'exhibiting the strangely altered hues of an ordinary Christian countenance, white shirt-front, light flowered waistcoat, blue-spotted neckerchief, and bottle-green coat' (p. 368). With his polished and red-free appearance, Diggory now embodies the self-made man on a regional scale. In fact, working as a reddleman which, as he claims, was 'a profitable trade' (p. 368), he was able to buy fifty cows to begin his own dairy business, and at the end of the novel he is finally able to marry Thomasin. With Wildeve dead and Clym almost incapacitated, it falls to Diggory to re-establish a stable and secure family as an integral part of rural village life. The novel ends with Diggory and Thomasin's marriage, in which the whole community takes part. This time, Diggory takes pleasure in asking Grandfer and Christian Cantle to sing for them, contrary to Wildeve's abrupt interruption of the song at the beginning of the novel. This scene discloses the idea that the enmeshed family system of Egdon is reinstated as the rural community is united with no profound class differentiation after having eradicated the menaces that were threatening its closed boundaries and its slow-paced rhythm of life.

Such a restoration of order is also possible thanks to the character of Thomasin. Conversely to Eustacia and Mrs Yeobright, the young woman resembles the Victorian ideal of the meek-angel of the household. As Boumelha claims, her behaviour is 'at once governed and sustained by an awareness of the judgment of others'.<sup>343</sup> When her marriage to Wildeve cannot be celebrated, as he has the wrong licence, Thomasin hides at home in shame and

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<sup>343</sup> Boumelha, *Thomas Hardy and Women*, p. 52.



leaves it only when she is officially his wife. Unlike Eustacia, who displays no maternal instincts, Thomasin is an affectionate mother to her infant daughter with Wildeve.<sup>344</sup> She is well liked by the community, even though they bemoan her ill-judged marriage with Wildeve. A furze-cutter, for instance, muses: ‘A pretty maid too she is. A young woman with a home must be a fool to tear her smock for a man like that’ (p. 27). Conscious of Wildeve’s repeated absences, she fails to confront him and yields to his bullying, thus sacrificing her happiness to preserve domestic peace: ‘There – now you are angry, and we won’t talk of this anymore’, she says submissively (p. 336). In opposition to Eustacia, she discloses a strong sense of belonging to the enmeshed regional system. When Clym suggests she might marry a professional man and live in a town, she responds ‘Egdon is a ridiculous old place [...] I couldn’t be happy anywhere else at all’ (p. 378). She does not embody the threat of modernity, and so for this reason she is rewarded with survival. At the end of the novel, she is able to reassert the female social norms overturned by Eustacia and Mrs Yeobright, to recreate the ‘cosy domesticity with husband and child’.<sup>345</sup> In addition, Thomasin is also able to maintain the equilibrium of a socially undifferentiated rural community as she, unlike Wildeve, ‘showed no superiority to the group at the door’ (p. 384) who came to congratulate her on her wedding day.

In conclusion, similarly to Zola, Thomas Hardy represents a region that appears secluded and removed from the nation as a whole. If, in *La Terre*, the author exposed the political and economic faults of capitalism through the characters’ profound and murderous individualism, this theme is absent from *The Return of the Native*. Hardy presents Egdon as economically and politically fixed in an ancient and slowed time, where people use old remedies to cure adders’ bites, and superstitious methods to exorcise what they believe to be a

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<sup>344</sup> See Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, p. 363.

<sup>345</sup> Boumelha, *Thomas Hardy and Women*, p. 51.

witch's spell. However, if in Zola themes such as social inequality were not overtly proposed, Hardy seems to use the regional microcosm as a magnifying glass to expose the social issues deriving from the disruptive class mobility of the national macrocosm of Victorian Britain. At the end of the novel, we can hypothesise that Hardy proposes a return to a simpler architecture of society when he re-establishes the equilibrium of both society and family through Thomasin and Diggory's marriage.

### Lombardy Between Political Isolation and the National Project

In Chapter Two, I argued that the regional family system in Manzoni's *I promessi sposi* allowed its members, Renzo and Lucia to separate and individualise not only from their original parental microcosm, but also from the macrocosmic system of the region as they establish their new nucleus in the free Republic of Venice. In this section I aim to investigate whether this functional psychodynamic aspect in Manzoni can be recognised also in a socio-political and economic context. A crucial aspect in this respect is the relationship between region and nation. Of course, it is anachronistic to talk about Italy as a nation in the context of the novel's seventeenth-century setting, and yet, as discussed in Chapter One above, the socio-political, geographical and linguistic architectures of the novel respond to the national aspirations of the Risorgimento by displacing topical issues such as foreign occupation and social inequality into the historical past. Robert Dombroski puts it succinctly by explaining that 'Manzoni's preference for the Seicento has also been explained in terms of a more specific patriotic finality, his aim being to repudiate the foreign domination of Italy in his times by portraying an analogous period of national crisis and misrule'.<sup>346</sup> As presented in the introductory chapter of this thesis, the nineteenth and the seventeenth centuries appear similar as in both Lombardy was subjected to foreign domination, the Austrian in the former, and the Spanish in the latter. We can argue that this retrospective writing allows Manzoni to discuss both explicitly and implicitly, as we shall see, political, social and economical matters of seventeenth-century Lombardy, while referring in reality to his nineteenth-century context, without risking censure or denounces.<sup>347</sup> The Introduction of *I promessi sposi* supports this

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<sup>346</sup> Robert Dombroski, 'The Seicento as Strategy: Providence and the Bourgeois in *I promessi sposi*', *MLN*, 91 (1976), 80-100 (p. 80).

<sup>347</sup> Sapegno, *Ritratto di Manzoni*, p. 105.

interpretation as the author pretends to have found the novel already written by a certain Anonymous author, and declares to have taken upon himself to render and publish it as he liked the plot ‘perché, in quanto storia, può essere che al lettore ne paia altrimenti, ma a me era parsa bella, come dico; molto bella’ (p. 5; ‘for I really believe, whatever the reader may think about it, that it is a good story; an excellent one, in fact’, p. 21). Manzoni seems to present himself as an editor rather than an author, possibly to avoid a direct responsibility of the story’s content.

In a manner similar to *La Terre* and *The Return of the Native*, *I promessi sposi* opens with a description of the Lecco territory, where the story begins, zooming in on the country roads that run across the hillsides:

Dall’una all’altra di quelle terre, dall’alture alla riva, da un poggio all’altro, correvano, e corrono tuttavia, strade e stradette, più o men ripide, o piane; ogni tanto affondate, sepolte tra due muri, donde, alzando lo sguardo, non iscoprite che un pezzo di cielo e qualche vetta di monte (p. 8).

Roads and tracks, some steep and some gently sloping, ran then, as they do today, from township to township, from mountain to shore, from knoll to knoll. They often sink into the earth, buried between high walls, so that if the traveller raises his eyes he can see nothing but a small patch of sky, and perhaps a distant peak (p. 26).

Also in *I promessi sposi* the roads and tracks connect the different hamlets of the region and Manzoni does not seem to depict a main road which links the inside with the outside. The description of the road as ‘[sunk] into the earth and buried between high walls’ (p. 26), on the one hand highlights the intricate aspect of the roads limited to the inside of the region; on the

other hand it discloses a sense of oppression and subjugation in the traveller who can only see a patch of sky. Unlike what we observed in Zola and Hardy, the concept of space in Manzoni's Lombardy takes on a twofold representation. The first image we encounter is that of the circumscribed and remote reality of Renzo and Lucia's village, a small and rural hamlet whose economy appears local, agricultural and artisan. This environment appears to correspond to the regional space depicted also by both Zola and Hardy. The second representation we find of Manzoni's space is Lombardy as a whole, in that it is not only a region, but also a true state with its own political, legislative and economic organs. Interestingly, these two representations coexist, whereby the first is contained in the second. What in my opinion makes Lombardy more similar to a regionalist dimension, however, as we shall analyse later on, is the lack of any national trajectories. The presence of the Spanish domination had reduced Lombardy to a mere district of the Bourbon Empire and had rendered the state closed to the Italian territory that surrounded it and towards any possible influence. During the seventeenth century, in fact, most of the Italian regions were under French, Augsburg, or Spanish control. After the peace of Cateau-Cambrésis (1559), which ended the conflicts between France and Augsburg, the Bourbons gained more power over Lombardy, and they dominated with an iron fist for over a century and a half, causing wars, famines and epidemics, as we shall discuss later. If in Zola and Hardy the lack of roads underlined the community's wish to remain detached from the nation, in Manzoni it highlights a separation imposed on the region by a conqueror. We can argue that in this case the territorial borders are closed also from a political perspective, as they rigidly delimit the separation between politically diverse Italian states. Moreover, if La Beauce and Egdon Heath kept the foreign and the 'other', outside the region, Lombardy bears the marks of foreign occupation:

Ai tempi in cui accaddero i fatti che prendiamo a raccontare, quel borgo, già considerabile, era anche un castello, e aveva perciò l'onore d'alloggiare un comandante, e il vantaggio di possedere una stabile guarnigione di soldati spagnoli, che insegnavan la modestia alle fanciulle e alle donne del paese, accarezzavan di tempo in tempo le spalle a qualche marito, a qualche padre (p. 8).

At the time of the events we are about to relate, Lecco was already a place of some importance, and was also a fortress. For that reason it had the honour of accommodating a garrison commander, and the advantage of providing lodging for a permanent force of Spanish soldiers, who gave lessons in modest department to the girls and the women of the area, and who tickled the backs of the odd husband or father with a stick from time to time (p. 26).

Characteristically, Manzoni's antiphrastic style conveys bitter, ironic resignation. The Spanish troops 'honour' the locals with their presence by plundering and exploiting the region's grain resources and molesting women. Unlike Zola and Hardy, in whose novels the natives dominated in the regional space and pushed any stranger out, in Manzoni a brutal foreign force controls the natives of the region and forces members of the community into exile.

From the very first chapters of the novel, it becomes clear that Lombardy suffers from economic stagnation and mismanagement. Manzoni's meticulous historical research provided him with evidence to expose the faults of the highly regulated economic system imposed by Spanish rule, which stifled free commerce with privileges, tariffs and high taxation.<sup>348</sup> We see

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<sup>348</sup> See Domenico Sella, *Crisis and Continuity, The Economy of Spanish Lombardy in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 16.

the first signs of this impending crisis when Father Cristoforo, close friend and counsellor of the protagonists, walks through the countryside:

La fanciulla scarna, tenendo per la corda al pascolo la vaccherella magra stecchita e si inchinava in fretta a rubarle, per cibo della famiglia, qualche erba, di cui la fame aveva insegnato che anche gli uomini potevano vivere (p. 56).

A half-starved girl was tugging a desperately bony cow along on a rope. The child scanned the ground in front of her, and bent quickly down from time to time to deprive the brute of some herb which hunger had taught her to recognise as food on which man too could live, and which she could take home for her family (p. 77).

The sylph-like appearance of the young girl who steals grass from her even skinnier cow reveals the tragic effects of decades of misgovernment: poverty and famine. Manzoni refers to the 1628 Lombard famine, caused, according to Domenico Sella, by ‘adverse weather conditions and aggravated by trade stoppages resulting from war’.<sup>349</sup> The Bourbons, in the seventeenth century, milked Lombardy to fund their engagement in the Thirty Years’ War. In order to do so, they had started taxing the land workers, requiring them to bring to the city of Milan one-third, or ‘even half of their crop’.<sup>350</sup> Manzoni reflects the consequences of this policy on the Lombard peasants:

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<sup>349</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

E quella qualunque raccolta non era ancor finita di riporre, che le provvisioni per l'esercito, e lo sciupinò che sempre l'accompagna, ci fecero dentro un tal vòto, che la penuria si fece subito sentire (p. 202).

And that miserable harvest was not yet fully gathered in, when requisitions for the army, together with the wholesale waste that always accompany them, made such a hole in it that the shortage of grain began to be felt immediately (p. 231).

Starving farmers had nothing else to do but abandon their fields and go to find better fortune in the city. The Spanish taxation of the land workers produced a unilateral exchange of products whereby provisions would move from the countryside to the city, and not vice versa. According to Pietro Verri this forced 'labourers to flee and the land to lay uncropped'.<sup>351</sup>

The silk industry was hit hard, too. Manzoni tells us that Renzo 'esercitava la professione di filatore di seta; professione negli anni addietro assai lucrosa; allora già in decadenza' (p. 26; 'followed the trade of silk-spinner. In the early years it had been a fairly lucrative calling, though it had fallen off', p. 46). According to Sella, the Lombard silk industry stopped being one of the region's main sources of income, because products could not be traded outside the state of Milan, and so every silk product had to be sent to the capital: 'silk export was, as a rule, prohibited, or was allowed only after the needs of the Milan silk manufacturers had been met'.<sup>352</sup> This was not unique to Spanish-ruled Milan: according to

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<sup>351</sup> Pietro Verri, *Considerazioni sul commercio dello stato di Milano* (Milan: Università Bocconi, 1939), p. 36.

<sup>352</sup> Gian Piero Bognetti, 'La seta in Lombardia', *Problemi Italiani*, 1 (1922), 1-50 (p. 28).  
Domenico Sella, *Crisis and Continuity*, p. 20.



Robert Dombroski, ‘the division of the peninsula into small political bodies, and their consequent impenetrable economic isolation, fostered restricted internal markets and oppressive system of tariffs and duties’.<sup>353</sup>

The lunch scene at Don Rodrigo’s mansion forms a striking contrast with the image of the famished peasant girl. The warlord treats his guests to an abundant feast and receives their compliments. The doctor claims ‘Dichiaro e definisco che i pranzi dell’illustrissimo Don Rodrigo vincono le cene d’Eliogabalo e [...] che in questo palazzo siede e regna la splendidezza’ (p. 83; ‘I hold and maintain that the dinners of the most noble Don Rodrigo surpass the feast of Heliogabalus and that [...] this palace is the seat of reign and magnificence’, p. 106). Metaphorically, on a local scale, Don Rodrigo mirrors the widespread corruption and abuse of power, which the Spanish government exercised at large and its refusal to recognise and react to the real causes of the present crisis. The aristocrat Don Rodrigo as well sticks to the official line that ‘Non c’è carestia, sono gli’intercettatori [...] e i fornai che nascondono il grano. Impiccarli’ (p. 83; ‘There’s no famine at all really, it’s the profiteers, cornering the market. And the bakers hiding their stocks of grain. Hanging is the only thing for them’, p. 106). As the historian Alberto Mingardi states ‘When people are baffled by events out of their control, they tend to look for scapegoats instead of attempting to understand the causes of the upheaval. Finding a guilty party becomes an all-consuming passion’.<sup>354</sup> This appears to be what we witness during the lunch at Don Rodrigo’s palace where instead of investigating the intestine sources of the famine everyone seems to be concerned with, the tyrant and his guests prefer to blame the bakers who supposedly hide the

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<sup>353</sup> Dombroski, ‘The Seicento as Strategy’, p. 83.

<sup>354</sup> Alberto Mingardi, ‘Manzoni’s Unfulfilled Legacy’, *The New Criterion*, 6 (2018), 35-38 (p. 35).

wheat. This belief is also mirrored in the Chancellor Antonio Ferrer, whose economic illiteracy produces devastating consequences in Milan.

In Chapter XII of the novel, Manzoni looks at the measures adopted by the Spanish administrators in 1628 to tackle the wheat shortage, with the critical eye of an Enlightenment thinker well-versed in the theories of Adam Smith and the Physiocrats.<sup>355</sup> The scarcity caused by bad harvests and abandoned fields, causes a riot in Milan as the price of bread increases. The Chancellor Antonio Ferrer has replaced the Governor Don Gonzalo, away at war, in matters concerning the economy, and in order to placate the populace, he decides to fix the price of bread ‘al prezzo che sarebbe stato giusto, se il grano si fosse comunemente venduto trentatre lire il moggio: e si vendeva fino a ottanta’ (p. 204; ‘at the level that would have been right with corn at thirty-three lire per measure. But it was really being sold at up to eighty’, p. 233). This populist move initially appeases the urban masses, but it is not a long-term solution to the crisis. Bakers are forced to ‘intridere, dimenare, infornare e sfornare senza posa’ (p. 204; ‘mix, knead, put dough in the ovens and take bread out of them all day long, without ever pausing for breath’, p. 233), to balance out their expenses with sales. In fact, Ferrer’s decision to appoint a ‘meta’ (p. 204; ‘maximum price’, p. 232) is made on the incorrect assumption that grain is abundant: ‘i magazzini, e i granai, colmi, traboccanti’ (p. 203; ‘the storehouses and granaries were known to be full, overflowing, bursting with grain’, p. 232), when in truth famine was spreading throughout the whole state. As Giuseppe De Luca notes, Ferrer’s introduction of the ‘meta’ only acts on the effect rather than on the cause of

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<sup>355</sup> On this issue see Giorgio Bosco, ‘Politica, diritto ed economia ne *I promessi sposi* di Alessandro Manzoni’, *Rivista di studi politici internazionali*, 82 (2015), 567-574 (p. 572).

Lombardy's economic crisis.<sup>356</sup> Soon it is the bakers' turn to protest: 'protestavano di voler gettare la pala nel forno, e andarsene' (p. 205; 'they swore they would rather throw their shovels in the fire and emigrate than go on like that', p. 234). With hindsight, Manzoni concludes that the only possible solution to reduce demand in a condition of inelastic offer was to increase the price of grain, a 'doloroso ma salutare' (p. 203; 'painful but salutary', p. 231) act, which Don Gonzalo hastens to make on his return. According to De Luca, bread inflation will have a twofold positive effect: it will take the wheat out of the storage units, and it will distribute it to markets where there was more scarcity.<sup>357</sup> In addition, Mingardi claims that in calling the rise of bread's price 'salutary', Manzoni seems to underline his firm belief in that 'higher prices would draw grain from foreign countries, as lure of profit would outweigh the trouble of transport and storage' and that 'a price rise would raise the incentive for local producers to grow more grain'.<sup>358</sup>

Unfortunately, this unpopular measure is met with rioting by a population already in dire need, who turn their anger against bakers and start stealing bread. Manzoni, never a supporter of bottom-up revolution, is keen to stress that the irrational, impulsive actions of the crowd are ultimately counterproductive and only speed up the process of crisis and spread it throughout the whole region. In fact, the only effect the rebellion has is 'guasto e perdita effettiva dei viveri' (p. 458; 'great wastage and effective loss of foodstuffs', p. 512), which leads to the impoverishment of a city where workshops are closed and masters dismiss their young apprentices, who then go begging for food in the street. In the countryside, already

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<sup>356</sup> Giuseppe De Luca, 'Manzoni, *I promessi sposi* e l'economia milanese del Seicento', in *Sguardi sull'Asia e altri scritti in onore di Alessandra Cristina Lavagnino*, ed. by Clara Bulfoni, Emma Lupano and Bettina Mottura (Milan: LED, 2017), pp. 485-504 (p. 487).

<sup>357</sup> Ibid., p. 488.

<sup>358</sup> Mingardi, 'Manzoni's Unfulfilled Legacy', p. 35.

suffering from the famine, the Spanish soldiers pillage the peasants' homes for any hidden provisions: 'invase e spogliate le loro case dalla soldatesca, alloggiata lì o di passaggio, n'eran fuggiti disperatamente' (p. 460; 'there were people whose houses had been invaded and despoiled by soldiers who had been billeted on them, or by soldiers who had merely been passing that way, so that they had fled from their homes in despair', p. 515). Unlike Zola and Hardy, who throughout their novels kept the city and the rest of the region distinctly separated, underlining also a profound antagonism between the two, in Manzoni they are shown as interdependent and part of the same political and economic system. I disagree with Guido Baldi, who opposes Renzo and Lucia's idyllic village to the nightmarish, oppressive atmosphere of anguish residing in the city, since this anguish belongs also to the betrothed's native village, where the atmosphere of oppression, perpetrated by the tyrant Don Rodrigo, renders the place far from idyllic.<sup>359</sup>

Manzoni's account of the famine suggests that he supports the idea of a free market, a notion demonstrated further in the pages dedicated to Renzo's life in Bergamo. In opposition to Zola and Hardy, who focused their novels on the representation of a single region, thus underlining its separation from the rest of the nation, Manzoni depicts two regions, Lombardy and the Republic of Venice, using the latter to highlight the negative aspects of the former's economic seclusion. Pursued by the Milanese police after he gets involved in the bread riot, Renzo crosses the border to the Venetian Republic and finds a job in Bergamo, through his cousin Bortolo, who has already settled there. The famine has reached Bergamo as well, 'Anche qui si patisce un pò la fame,' says Bortolo (p. 292; 'people are a bit short of food here too', p. 330), but things are not as disastrous as in Lombardy, since the Venetian state is not encumbered by the numerous taxes and administrative impediments that stalled Lombardy's economy. Bortolo explains that Bergamo avoided the grain shortage by importing it from

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<sup>359</sup> Baldi, *I promessi sposi*, p. 131.

Turkey: ‘la città ha comprate duemila some di grano da un mercante che sta a Venezia: grano che vien di Turchia; ma, quando si tratta di mangiare, la non si guarda tanto per il sottile (p. 292; ‘the city has bought two thousand loads of corn from a trader down in Venice. It comes from Turkey, as a matter of fact; but when it’s a question of eating or going hungry you can’t be too particular about details’, p. 330). He also adds that the Senate had more corn sent also to the countryside and then distributed it where it was most needed. The Republic of Venice – for Manzoni – is the model of a well-run, modern state inspired by rational ideas.

Manzoni’s understanding of the political economy is heavily indebted to Adam Smith, the Scottish economist, who believed that the only way a nation could flourish was if the government limited its intervention in economic affairs as every individual tending to his own amelioration would be central in the creation of a wealthy nation.<sup>360</sup> The Venetian Republic’s barrier-free domestic and international trade encourages the development and accumulation of wealth, as well as the birth of an early form of capitalism. Bortolo is there to explain it all to his newly arrived cousin. He tells Renzo, ‘Il padrone mi vuol bene, e ha della roba. E, a dirtela, in gran parte la deve a me, senza vantarmi: lui il capitale, e io quella poca abilità’ (p. 291; ‘The boss here thinks a lot of me, and he’s not at all badly off. And I can honestly say that he owes a lot of it to me. He provides the capital, and I provide my skill, such as it is’, p. 329). Bortolo outlines for Renzo’s benefit the basic socio-economic relations present under capitalism: the skilled worker provides his labour, and the employer invests his capital. Money and skills are at the base of this small entrepreneurship, which can expand and can create employment for others, thereby becoming a pillar of the capitalist system. In fact, the presence of capital, generated by the free market, not only prevents the famine, but also allows individual advancement as, by the end of the novel, Bortolo and Renzo become co-

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<sup>360</sup> Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into The Nature and Causes of The Wealth of Nations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 230.

owners of a small factory. Unlike in Zola, where the foreigner Jean is pushed out of a region to which he does not belong, Renzo finds a better life for himself and his family in Bergamo.

Besides the inter-regional dimension, Manzoni's novel is clearly part of a larger debate about the future of Italy as a nation in the nineteenth century. Commenting on the bread riots, the author points out at the absurdity of the people's behaviour, who furiously rebel against 'i mali mezzani' (p. 464; 'moderate evils', p. 519), so the circumstantial issue of bread prices, but do not protest against the real evil, namely Spanish domination which causes famine, war and plague. We humans, he generalises, 'sopportiamo, il colmo di ciò che da principio avevamo chiamato insopportabile' (p. 464; 'put up with twice the load which we had declared to be unbearable earlier on', p. 519). According to Enzo Girardi in the sections dedicated to the bread riots, Manzoni seems to blame and criticise both the Spanish domination and the crowd of Milan.<sup>361</sup> I take this statement further and, considering famine, war and plague as events strictly related to the foreign domination, I hypothesise that Manzoni is in fact criticising human passivity towards said dominion that is defined as 'unbearable'. Interestingly, in my opinion, this criticism is directed implicitly at his contemporaries subjugated by the Austrians. As Olga Ragusa puts it, 'Manzoni chose the setting of Milan under its long Spanish domination in support of the anti-Austrian conspiracies common in the Lombardy of the Restoration, as well as to make a statement of support in defence of the independence movement of the Risorgimento'.<sup>362</sup> Among the three authors considered herein, Manzoni is the only one who starts from the regional microcosm to

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<sup>361</sup> Girardi, *Manzoni reazionario*, p.18.

<sup>362</sup> Olga Ragusa, 'Alessandro Manzoni and Developments in the Historical Novel', in *The Cambridge Companion to The Italian Novel*, ed. by Peter Bondanella and Andrea Ciccarelli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 42-60 (p. 48).

paint a nationalistic trajectory, inviting all Italians to shake off the yoke of foreign rule and despotic governments.

Another target of Manzoni's Enlightened critique is the law – or rather the law as an instrument of abuse in an undemocratic regime. In Seicento Lombardy, 'la forza legale non proteggeva in alcun conto l'uomo tranquillo, inoffensivo, e che non avesse altri mezzi di far paura altrui' (p. 16; 'the forces of the law gave no protection to the tranquil, inoffensive type of man, who had no other means of inspiring fear in anyone else', p. 35). Manzoni exposes the corruption of Lombard politics, which protected and accommodated the upper classes and aristocrats at the expenses of the working, lower classes. Although there was no shortage of detailed laws or *gride* (p. 16; 'proclamations', p. 35), these were only applied in favour of the nobles, and overlords such as Don Rodrigo. When Don Abbondio refuses to celebrate Renzo and Lucia's wedding because he was threatened by Don Rodrigo's bravi, Renzo is determined to seek justice: 'La farò io, la giustizia, io!' (p. 101; 'Justice'll be done, and it'll be done by me!', p. 125). Following Agnese's advice, the young man goes to see the lawyer known as Dottor Azeccagarbugli (Doctor Quibbler), who initially supports Renzo's cause and has no difficulty locating a proclamation stating that whomever pressures and hampers the work of a priest is punishable 'pena pecuniaria e corporale, ancora di relegatione o di galera, e fino alla morte' (p. 45; 'with monetary and bodily penalties, including condemnation to the galleys, and the penalty of death', p. 65). However, it soon becomes apparent that Azeccagarbugli has mistaken Renzo for a *bravo*, one of the henchmen in the service of a nobleman whom he is accustomed to defending. In fact when Renzo explains that he is the victim and not the perpetrator and that the 'dirty trick was played' (p. 68) on him by Don Rodrigo, the doctor drives Renzo away stating abruptly 'Io non c'entro: me ne lavo le mani' (p. 48; 'The whole thing is nothing to do with me: I wash my hands of it', p. 69). Sure enough, a few chapters later we find the lawyer having lunch with Don Rodrigo himself 'in atto d'un rispetto il più

puro, il più sviscerato (p. 76; ‘in an attitude of the purest, the most abject respect’, p. 98), a passage which truly expresses the idea that in the Lombard state, the noble class was bound inextricably to the legal power and governed the lives of the lower classes.<sup>363</sup> Paraphrasing Ezio Raimondi, Manzoni – through Azzecagarbugli – introduces in the region a degraded, cynical, greedy and servile legislation that underlines a political life characterised by a parade of corruption, artifices and schemes.<sup>364</sup>

Seventeenth-century Lombardy is a feudal society, where the figure of the citizen does not exist. Perpetua, the curate’s housekeeper, supports this idea further when she tells the young man, ‘Mala cosa nascer povero, il mio caro Renzo’ (p. 30; ‘It’s a sad thing to be born poor, my dear lad’, p. 51). Similarly to Zola’s community, wherein peasants like Buteau and Lise murder Françoise and are not prosecuted, Manzoni presents his region as lawless, with corrupt officials and the higher classes exercising absolute and arbitrary power. It is significant that the dramatic series of events follows from a simple bet Don Rodrigo has made with his cousin Count Attilio, who had challenged him to conquer Lucia before the day of St Martins. According to Stanley Bernard Chandler, Lucia’s secret departure from the village threatens Don Rodrigo’s position and prestige in society. In fact ‘it is honour which motivates Don Rodrigo in his persecution of Lucia’.<sup>365</sup> So the tyrant decides to use the law which is in his favour and have Dr Quibbler produce a *grida* ‘per far sfrattare [Renzo] dallo stato: e per riuscire in questo, vedeva che più della forza gli avrebbe potuto servir la giustizia’ (p. 194; ‘to

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<sup>363</sup> On the Quibbler’s lack of right juridical principles see Pierantonio Frare, ‘Me ne lavo le mani, la giustizia e il suo rovescio nel capitolo III dei *Promessi sposi*’, *Rivista di studi manzoniani*, 1 (2017), 77-88 (p. 84).

<sup>364</sup> Raimondi, ‘*I promessi sposi* e la ricerca della giustizia’, p. 5.

<sup>365</sup> Chandler, *Alessandro Manzoni The History of a Spiritual Quest*, p. 90.



have [Renzo] officially exiled from the state. He realised that his ends would be better served by recourse to the law than by the use of force', p. 223).

The Church, too, is implicated in the abuse of power. When Don Rodrigo discovers that Father Cristoforo has helped the two betrothed escape, Count Attilio manages to get him transferred to another convent. Under pressure from the two men's uncle, a member of the Privy Council, the Provincial Superior of Father Cristoforo's order sends the friar to Rimini. Aware that this powerful family wants the friar removed for private revenge, the cleric is still keen to comply with their request not to jeopardise what seems to be a long-standing relation of patronage: 'Conosciamo per prova la bontà della casa' (p. 318; 'The kindness of your family is already known to us from long experience', p. 359), he acknowledges.

Political corruption and foreign rule come together with the rigid social hierarchy typical of early modern European societies. Lombardy, unlike La Beauce and Egdon Heath, is divided into two segregated groups, aristocrats and commoners. According to Alfredo Sisca, Manzoni's category of 'gli umili' is not exclusively an economic one, but it does include all of those subjected to the abuse of the most powerful in society.<sup>366</sup> The gap between the two social classes appears unbridgeable, as it is based on a master/servant system.<sup>367</sup> For what concerns Renzo, what exemplifies his submitted status in relation to authority figures, are his difficulties with communication. This is evident in a number of moments in the novel. First, we see it when Don Abbondio lies to Renzo about the true reason behind the impossibility of celebrating his wedding on the fixed day.<sup>368</sup> The priest, instead of telling Renzo of Don Rodrigo's threats, hides the truth from the young man, speaking to him confusing words in Latin and therefore exploiting Renzo's ignorance of the ancient language. Similarly, when

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<sup>366</sup> Sisca, *Cultura e letteratura*, p. 26.

<sup>367</sup> Raimondi, '*I promessi sposi e la ricerca della giustizia*', p. 4.

<sup>368</sup> Raimondi, *Il romanzo senza idillio*, p. 176.

Azzeccagarbugli understands that Renzo is not a bravo and is instead going against Don Rodrigo, he blames the silk-spinner for misleading him in this assumption, stating ‘Siete tutti così: possibile che non sappiate dirle chiare le cose?’ (p. 48; ‘You’re all the same. Will you never learn to tell a story so a man can understand it?’, p. 68). Azzeccagarbugli’s words underline not only Renzo’s inability to express his claim, but also using the plural ‘you’re all the same’, the lawyer makes him representative of an entire social class, uneducated and with whom it is difficult to communicate. This concept is then more explicit in another statement of Azzeccagarbugli, when he says, ‘Eh via! Fate di questi discorsi tra voi altri, che non sapete misurar le parole; e non venite a farli con un galantuomo che sa quanto valgono’ (p. 48; ‘That’s quite enough. You can use that sort of language with your own friends, who don’t know any better; but don’t come and talk like that to a respectable man, who’s accustomed to weighing his words’, p. 69). Unlike Don Abbondio who does not let Renzo understand, Azzeccagarbugli pretends not to understand him and dismisses the young man to hide his involvement in Don Rodrigo’s affairs. Correspondingly, if Don Abbondio and Azzeccagarbugli hamper communication to prevail over and exploit the lower class, Renzo also seems to create a misunderstanding with another authority figure, the policeman disguised as a civilian, at the Full Moon Inn in Milan. Here, Renzo refuses to tell the innkeeper his name and place of birth for fear of being discovered by Don Rodrigo. The young man states ‘Posso avere delle buone ragioni per non dirlo, il mio nome’ (p. 239; ‘Now I might have very good reasons to keep quiet about my name’, p. 273). Renzo tries to motivate his statement with a monologue against the law talking in riddles and fragmented phrases. He claims ‘Vuol dire, quella faccia: comanda chi può, e ubbidisce chi vuole. Quando questa faccia avrà fatto andare in galera il signor don [...] basta, lo so io’ (p. 239; ‘That face, let those command who can, and let those obey who want to. Now if that face has sent my lord Don [...] never mind his name’, p. 273). His ambiguous communication together with

the applause he receives from the bystanders at the inn, makes him appear as the rioters' leader, and this does not escape the policeman who immediately plans to take him to prison.<sup>369</sup> Therefore, in my opinion, Don Abbondio's deliberately erudite language, Azzecagarbugli's false misunderstanding and Renzo's confused declarations at the Full Moon Inn demonstrate the distance between the social classes, each of which seems almost to speak a different language. Moreover, it appears clear that the dominant class shares no interest in communicating with the lower one, and it uses this non-communication as an instrument to subjugate the humble and to maintain intact the master/servant relationship.

While Renzo is antagonised and punished by various authority figures, Lucia attracts admiration and condescension – more subtle forms of exploitation. Don Rodrigo wants to place her under his 'protection' (p. 87). In the convent in Monza, Gertrude takes Lucia under her protection because 'si compiaceva dell'ingenuità e della dolcezza della poverina, e nel sentirsi ringraziare e benedire ogni momento' (p. 301; 'she took pleasure in the poor girl's ingenuous sweetness of character, and also in having grateful blessings', p. 339). Others help her out of narcissistic motives, to enhance their status. Donna Prassede, for instance, takes Lucia in after she is released by the Innominato, but only to look good in the eyes of the cardinal Federigo Borromeo who proposed to find a place of safety for the girl: 'punta dal desiderio di secondare e prevenire a un tratto quella buona intenzione, s'esibì di prender la giovane in casa' (p. 416; 'she was moved by the desire to second his good resolution, and at the same time to anticipate it. So she expressed herself as willing to take Lucia into her own household', p. 467). Through Donna Prassede, Manzoni presents that 'pseudo-charity', which

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<sup>369</sup> On the ambiguity in the dialogue between Renzo and the innkeeper consult Maria Conti, 'Con Manzoni all'osteria della Luna Piena', in *Leggere i Promessi Sposi*, ed. by Giovanni Manetti (Milan: Bompiani, 1990), pp. 35-48 (p. 40).

the upper class as a whole proudly possessed.<sup>370</sup> In fact, she believes in monopolising all good actions, but her alleged wish to help others is only a disguise to dominate over them.

In the world Manzoni depicts, no route to economic and social advancement is open to the lower classes. Robert Dombroski calls it a ‘pre-bourgeoisie society’.<sup>371</sup> The idea of class mobility, which we discussed in Hardy, appears absent in Lombardy due to the ‘political and economic servitude’ of the region.<sup>372</sup> According to Dombroski, through the depiction of class immobility in Lombardy, Manzoni mirrors the difficulty of a middle class trying to establish itself in nineteenth-century Italy.<sup>373</sup> To escape class oppression and become a free economic agent, Renzo must move away. Similarly, the middle classes in nineteenth-century Italy had less political and economic power than they had in France or Britain. For some historians, the absence of a strong bourgeoisie in Italy slowed down economic and social progress and delayed the process of unification. It also had long-standing consequences for the national self-image: according to Rodolfo Morandi, the mental structure of the Italian middle class was not characterised, as in the rest of Europe, by self-reliance, but by doubt and uncertainty.<sup>374</sup>

With the presentation of this historical context of Lombardy as regulated by arbitrary and foreign government, by the presence of a legislation in favour only of the powerful, by the absence of a free-market, and by a profound division between classes, Manzoni seems to present the reasons behind the peninsula’s general backwardness. In fact, we can argue that the choice of retrospective writing is a device for Manzoni to address the ruling class of his

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<sup>370</sup> See Eugenio Donadoni, *Mito e realtà del Manzoni* (Milan: Gentile, 1945), p. 222.

<sup>371</sup> Dombroski, ‘The Seicento as Strategy’, p. 83.

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>374</sup> Rodolfo Morandi, *Storia della grande industria in Italia* (Turin: Einaudi, 1966), p. 49.

own time that was or should have been on the point of planning the peninsula's national future, to suggest guidelines that a modern society, in his opinion, should include.<sup>375</sup> Therefore, once again through Manzoni's antiphrastic style, the negative depiction of the seventeenth century becomes a portrait of how society should be organised in a liberal and bourgeois perspective: through the presentation of an arbitrary and foreign government in Lombardy in seventeenth century, Manzoni underlines the need for a strong state power in the nineteenth-century Italian peninsula to fight particularisms; through the narration of the injustice Renzo and Lucia suffer, the author wishes for a modern society with an equal and rational legislation; through the depiction of the famine, the bread riots and the impossibility of importing wheat to Milan from foreign parts, the author underlines his support of a liberal economy as pivotal feature in the development of a unified nation; finally, describing two social classes in the novel, the powerful and the humble, Manzoni expresses the need of an organisation for his modern society that allows no class conflict.<sup>376</sup> In addition, if the seventeenth century setting allows Manzoni to address the ruling class of his time from a political point of view, from a religious perspective, it also allows the author to address men in their search to find a way to face life's unexpected misadventures. As scholar Natalino Sapegno supports, *I promessi sposi's* context shows how the evils of society such as injustice, famine, war and plague underline the idea of permanent human vulnerability to which everyone is subjected.<sup>377</sup> As we shall see in the following section, through Renzo's desperate search for justice in this world, Manzoni proposes a society based on charity and solidarity, with a deep faith in divine providence as only resolution to misery and cruelty.

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<sup>375</sup> Sapegno, *Ritratto di Manzoni*, p. 46.

<sup>376</sup> On Manzoni's Enlightened ideals and class division compare Chandler, *Alessandro Manzoni The History of a Spiritual Quest*, p. 88.

<sup>377</sup> Sapegno, *Ritratto di Manzoni*, p. 49.

Let us now take a closer look at the community inhabiting this geographical and economic environment. More than in the previous two novels, in *I promessi sposi* religion and the Church play a fundamental role. The Seicento setting allows Manzoni to explore the social effects of Counter-Reformation and observe the Catholic Church in a period of great transformation. In the novel in fact we find four religious figures, two of them embodying the pre-Reformation Church, Don Abbondio and Gertrude, and two of them representing the Church after the Reformation, Cardinal Federigo Borromeo and Father Cristoforo.<sup>378</sup> As is well known, the story opens with the encounter between Don Abbondio, curate of the village, and Don Rodrigo's henchmen, who order him not to celebrate Lucia's marriage to Renzo. Don Abbondio, not a 'cuor di leone' (p. 16; 'lion heart', p. 35), promptly responds with a loud 'Disposto [...] disposto sempre all'ubbidienza' (p. 15; 'Always his obedient servant', p. 34). Similarly to Father Godard in *La Terre*, whose individualism costs his congregation a priest, Don Abbondio reveals his profound disinterest in the fate of the two young people. In fact, when the two *bravi* threaten him, his sole preoccupation is to save his own life, forgetting his mission to serve the poor. The following day, Don Abbondio tells Renzo he will not be able to perform the wedding due to non-specified 'imbrogli' (p. 27; 'complications', p. 47). When Renzo discovers that Don Rodrigo is behind these 'complications', Don Abbondio begs him to understand and states 'Non si tratta di torto o di ragione; si tratta di forza' (p. 33; 'It's not a question of right or wrong, it's a question of power', p. 53). As seen above with the Provincial Superior, the Church appears subservient to political power. Furthermore, Don Abbondio's immediate surrender highlights his cowardice, which, as Manzoni explains, is what impelled him to become a priest, as he felt the habit would provide some protection in a violent, lawless society where he was 'un vaso di terra cotta, costretto a viaggiare in compagnia di molti vasi di ferro' (p. 18; 'an earthenware jar compelled to travel in the company of many

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<sup>378</sup> Burke, 'L'histoire dans un genre neuf', p. 273.

iron pots', p. 38). Since the law was not made to safeguard the rights of the 'tranquil man', Don Abbondio chose the priesthood, in order to live a quiet and safe existence. Similar to Zola, who reflected on the relationship between Church and State under the Second Empire, Manzoni exposes how part of the Italian clergy enjoyed many privileges and turned away from the abuses that the ruling classes perpetrated towards 'the humble'.<sup>379</sup>

In the absence of a modern democratic state, corporations such as the aristocracy, the military and the clergy offered the individual 'il vantaggio d'impiegar per sè, a proporzione della sua autorità e della sua destrezza, le forze riunite di molti' (p. 18; 'a personal advantage in being able to use the combined strength of many colleagues of his own behalf, in proportion of his own authority and skill', p. 37). Manzoni, however, was no revolutionary, and it is important to note that his resentment towards the upper classes does not lead him to question out-dated forms of authority; rather, it is directed against what he sees as the incorrect and harmful exercise of power.<sup>380</sup> In fact, Manzoni regarded the Church as a divine institution governed by humans.<sup>381</sup> Don Abbondio is a clergyman who falls short of his holy office, due to the entirely human flaws of selfishness, fear and indolence, which is why the narrator allows him a kind of redemption when, having survived the plague, he finally celebrates Renzo and Lucia's marriage at the end of the novel. The priest 'non nobile, non ricco' (p. 18; 'not noble, nor rich', p. 38), is the victim of a 'lawless age', just like Father Godard was the victim of an era of capitalistic individualism.<sup>382</sup>

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<sup>379</sup> Ibid., p. 274.

<sup>380</sup> On this issue, see Ferruccio Ulivi, *Il Romanticismo e Alessandro Manzoni* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1965), p. 167.

<sup>381</sup> Giovanni Zibordi, *I promessi sposi* (Sesto San Giovanni: Ferrari, 1970), p. 118.

<sup>382</sup> Eléonore Zommermann, 'Structural Patterns in Manzoni's *I promessi sposi*', *Italica*, 39 (1962), 159-172 (p. 167).

The other character belonging to the unreformed Church is possibly Gertrude, the nun at the convent in Monza where Lucia seeks sanctuary. Similarly to Don Abbondio, her vocation is not voluntary but imposed by her father: ‘la nostra infelice era ancor nascosta nel ventre della madre che la sua condizione era già irrevocabilmente stabilita. Rimaneva soltanto da decider se sarebbe stato un monaco o una monaca’ (p. 149; ‘the poor Signora was still hidden from view in her mother’s womb when her future status was irrevocably fixed. It only remained to decide whether she would be a monk or a nun’, p. 175). According to Gian Luca Potestà and Giovanni Vian, imposed vocation still belonged to the pre-reformed Church, as one of the new decrees of the Counter-Reformation was to improve morality by erasing from the Church those individuals who had chosen the veil for convenience or because they had been forced to do so.<sup>383</sup> Her pre-fixed and irrevocable status leads her to become an atypical nun. Gertrude, like Don Abbondio, enjoys the privileges to which her condition entitles her, because, according to Stanley Bernard Chandler, ‘of humility, charity and a Christian way of life she was taught nothing’.<sup>384</sup> Manzoni portrays her as proud of her noble origins, in that she is the daughter of the prince of the town, and she enjoys her title, ‘fu chiamata la signorina; posto distinto a tavola, nel dormitorio’ (p. 151; ‘she was generally known as the Signorina. She was given a special place at table and in the dormitory’, p. 177). She reveals traits of vanity – as disclosed in her waist-tight habit and in the lock of black hair hanging on her forehead, ‘che dimostrava o dimenticanza o disprezzo della regola che prescriveva di tenerli corti’ (p. 145; ‘[which] showed forgetfulness or disregard of the rule that said that a nun’s hair must always be kept short’, p. 171). Finally, Gertrude also gives in to physical pleasures when she forms a liaison with Egidio, ‘costui anzi che atterrito dai pericoli e dall’empietà

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<sup>383</sup> Gian Luca Potestà and Giovanni Vian, *Storia del Cristianesimo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2014), p. 334.

<sup>384</sup> Chandler, *Alessandro Manzoni The History of a Spiritual Quest*, p. 112.



dell'impresa, un giorno osò rivolgerle il discorso. La sventurata rispose' (p. 179; '[who] found the difficulty and the wickedness of the enterprise an attraction rather than a deterrent, had plucked up his courage to speak to her. The poor wretched answered him', p. 206). Comparably to Don Abbondio, paraphrasing Guido Baldi, Gertrude embodies the *exemplum* of the negative function of the aristocracy, which reneges on its duties and uses its privileges as instruments of oppression to produce and aggravate injustice.<sup>385</sup> Gertrude does not fulfil her role as a church minister attending to the humble individuals' needs. Instead of protecting Lucia, Gertrude hands her over to the *bravi*, pretending to send her on an errand. The nun in fact protects herself and her relationship with Egidio, which Don Rodrigo had threatened to render public, were she to oppose his abduction of Lucia.

As a counterpart to Don Abbondio's bad priest, Manzoni presents the saintly presence of Cardinal Federigo Borromeo, a historical figure remembered as Archbishop of Milan after the Council of Trent and founder of the city's famous Biblioteca Ambrosiana. In the novel, he is portrayed as a man of superior intelligence and pure faith who employs his wealth for the benefit of the poorest in society. Although he was born 'tra gli agi e le pompe' (p. 357; 'amid luxury and splendour', p. 401) in one of the most prominent aristocratic families of Lombardy, Cardinal Borromeo renounced luxury and splendour upon entering the convent. In Chapter XXII, almost entirely dedicated to Borromeo's hagiography, Manzoni tells of how the young novice 'volle una tavola piuttosto povera che frugale, usò un vestiario piuttosto povero che semplice; a conformità di questo, tutto il tenore della vita e il contegno' (p. 358; 'insisted on a diet which was not merely frugal but parsimonious, and on clothes which were not merely simple but austere; and all his behaviour, his whole way of life, was in keeping with his dress', p. 402). From this quote it appears clear how Borromeo wanted to be closer in lifestyle and attire to the humble class. Furthermore, and conversely to Don Abbondio, he

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<sup>385</sup> Baldi, *I promessi sposi*, p. 25.

embodies the Church's generosity and charity when during the famine he offers money to the indigents: 'radunando tutti i suoi mezzi, rendendo più rigoroso il risparmio, [...] aveva cercato ogni maniera di far denari, per impiegarli tutti in soccorso degli affamati' (p. 462; '[he] summoned up all his resources, imposed yet greater frugality on his household, [...] in a word tried every possible way of raising money, in order to use all of it for the rescue of the starving', p. 517). The Cardinal's acts of charity play an important role, not only because they exemplify Manzoni's ideal of Christianity, but also because they bring concrete economic aid to the city in a state of crisis and of abandonment by its political leaders. Although Manzoni, with characteristic realism, admits that Borromeo's help alone is not sufficient to respond to the enormous demand, this is still more useful than Ferrer's misguided decrees. Nevertheless, there is a sense that Christian charity can – and should – intervene to temper the effects of unbridled market forces and deficient state policies.<sup>386</sup> This is what Borromeo does when he buys grain and 'speditane una buona parte ai luoghi della diocesi, che n'eran più scarsi' (p. 462; '[sends] a large part of it out to the parts of his diocese which needed it most', p. 518).

Another example of Manzoni's ideal Church in the novel is found in the figure of Father Cristoforo, who embodies once again the spirit of charity and the ideal of justice. Born Lodovico, the spoiled son of a rich merchant, he suffers the snubs of the city's aristocrats, and so in order to spite them, he adopts the stance of 'un protettor degli oppressi, e un rivendicatore dei torti' (p. 58; 'a protector of the down-trodden and a righter of wrongs', p. 79). Nonetheless, his misconceived idea of self-administered justice leads to tragic consequences when, one day, he kills a rival nobleman, well-known for tormenting his inferiors, in a futile spat over the right of way. Now an assassin, Lodovico finds sanctuary in a

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<sup>386</sup> On Manzoni's religiously-infused notion of economics see Gianni Maritati, 'Manzoni, l'esigenza di una cultura economica cristianamente ispirata', *Nuova Umanità*, 60 (1988), 65-82 (p. 72).

church and there receives an illumination: ‘gli parve che Dio medesimo l’avesse messo sulla strada, e datogli un segno del suo volere, facendolo capitare in un convento, in quella congiura’ (p. 63; ‘it struck him that God himself had pointed the way, and given him a sign of his will, by granting him refuge in a monastery at that particular time’, p. 84). His guilt for this loss of life changes him and makes him realise that justice is not in the hands of man, but only in God’s. Later, when he confronts Don Rodrigo about his designs for Lucia, Father Cristoforo proclaims the ultimate authority of divine justice. In a passionate speech, the reformed murderer harangues Don Rodrigo: ‘Voi avete creduto che Dio abbia fatta una creatura a sua imagine, per darvi il piacere di tormentarla! Voi avete creduto che Dio non saprebbe difenderla! Voi avete disprezzato il suo avviso’ (p. 88; ‘You believe that God made a creature in his own image to give you the pleasure of tormenting her. You think that God will not defend her, and you despise his warning’, p. 111). Although Don Rodrigo commands political power and brute force, the only true authority is detained by God, so injustice must be limited and opposed; nevertheless, the instrument to achieve this goal according to Manzoni, is not a violent revolt but charity and faith in God.<sup>387</sup> What Baldi in his manual *I promessi sposi progetto di società e mito* seems to be suggesting is that religion leads safely to justice and avoids class struggle; this idea is collocated at the basis of the model of Catholic society Manzoni depicts in his novel. Baldi claims that Manzoni’s conception of life is tragic rather than idyllic, as after the ‘fall’, which irredeemably removes men from Eden, human life is forever polluted by evils and pain. Mario Puppo as well explains that according to Manzoni man’s life does not unfold within the pathways of a preordained idyll, but rather on the margins of an ever-present mortal risk.<sup>388</sup> For Manzoni, as explained by Baldi, men can only

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<sup>387</sup> Baldi, *I promessi sposi*, p. 181.

<sup>388</sup> Mario Puppo, *Poesia e verità: interpretazioni manzoniane* (Florence: G. D’Anna, 1979), p.

achieve a state of quiet happiness, through religion and domestic serenity, but they can never re-create the primordial idyll. Focusing specifically on Renzo, Baldi believes that his direct experience of reality's negativity is essential to his process of maturity because it leads him initially to acknowledge the lower class' necessity of patience in a world that lacks order and justice; and secondly to renounce his competitive ambitions and to submit to God's will awaiting His one and true reward, and His one and true justice.<sup>389</sup>

However, when reading Baldi, one has the feeling that Manzoni urges the lower classes simply to be patient and not rebel against injustice, as they cannot have an active function in history, due to their inability to be political subjects. This active function in the novel, according to Baldi, is instead appointed to individuals belonging to the upper class (Cristoforo, the Unnamed, Federigo), which, in obedience to Christian principles, counteracts society's evil by fighting injustice and abuses.<sup>390</sup> In reality, these three figures do not 'fight' injustice but rather help the weak by offering comfort, as we see with Fra Cristoforo tending to the plague victims at the Lazzaretto, or by giving assistance on a more practical level, like Federigo Borromeo, who buys grain for those in need, and the Unnamed who offers hospitality in his castle during the Landsknecht's invasion of Lombardy. Similarly to Baldi, Gianni Maritati has argued that there is a tension in the novel between a Smithian economy, which proposes the government's eradication of taxes in order to facilitate and intensify trades and to create capital for all, and a fatalistic reliance on providence to resolve society's problems.<sup>391</sup> I disagree with both Baldi and Maritati's views, in the sense that Manzoni does not support subjugation or a passive acceptance of exploitations but patience and faith in God.

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<sup>389</sup> Baldi, *I promessi sposi*, p. 122.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid., p. 185.

<sup>391</sup> Maritati, 'Manzoni', p. 66.

This is clear in the dialogue between Father Cristoforo and Renzo at the beginning of the novel when the capuchin urges forbearance to the enraged young man:

Ma pazienza! E' una magra parola, una parola amara, per chi non crede; ma tu [...] ! Non vorrai tu concedere a Dio un giorno, due giorni, il tempo che vorrà prendere, per far trionfare la giustizia? [...] Lascia fare a Lui, Renzo; e sappi [...] sappiate ch'io ho già in mano un filo per aiutarvi (p. 100).

But be patient! Patience is a poor word, a bitter word for those who have no faith. But you, Renzo, can you not give God a day, or two days, or whatever time it pleases him to take, to make justice triumph? [...] Leave things to Him, Renzo; I've already got something in hand, only a thread to help us out of this trouble (p. 124).

Providence is a key concept in *I promessi sposi*. According to Luciano Parisi, providence for the Italian author, is the object of that indeterminable faithfulness, of that instinctual rather than rational credence, which survives pain and fortifies against it.<sup>392</sup> An ardent Catholic, Manzoni believes that God is not indifferent to what takes place on earth but actively intervenes in human affairs to ensure that good triumphs over evil. Only thanks to their candid faith in a providential God can the weakest in society endure misery, famine and abuses without giving into desperation or to temptation to find justice through violence. Furthermore, Parisi explains, and we shall see this in the dialogue between Renzo and Father Cristoforo, sufferings can also lead to a moral amelioration and serenity.<sup>393</sup> Paraphrasing Ulivi, with the statement 'be patient!' Father Cristoforo seems to suggest that providence

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<sup>392</sup> Luciano Parisi, *Manzoni e Bossuet* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2003), p. 110.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

exists even if it is not visible; and that even if one cannot see it, he or she must believe it to be present in every human event.<sup>394</sup> Interestingly, following the psychodynamic approach described in Chapter Two of this study, it seems possible in this context to read the concept of providence as a ‘buffer effect’ in that it becomes the factor able to protect the individuals and alleviate their sufferings connected to negative and stressful life events.<sup>395</sup>

Proof that the author is not proposing passive and fatalistic subjugation to his humble protagonists is found in Lucia. Upon discovering Don Rodrigo’s plans, Lucia tries to dissuade Renzo from his thirst for revenge and self-achieved justice, reminding him that ‘Il Signore c’è anche per i poveri; e come volete che ci aiuti, se facciam del male?’ (p. 41; ‘God is the God of the poor as well as the rich; but how can you expect him to help us if we sin against him?, p. 61). Introducing the idea, which we will discuss in a moment, that self-achieved justice seems to lead irredeemably to an act against God. At the same time, however, Lucia finds a tangible and pragmatic solution by proposing that they move away, far from Don Rodrigo: ‘Voi avete un mestiere, e io so lavorare: andiamo tanto lontano, che colui non senta più parlar di noi’ (p. 41; ‘You have a trade, and I know how to work. Let’s go away, so far away that he will never hear of us again’, p. 61). Lucia, who embodies Manzoni’s vision of non-violent struggle and spiritual emancipation, seems to know full well that in the Spanish Lombardy the lower class cannot find justice in the law. For this reason, although confiding in God’s help, Lucia does not wait solely for divine intervention. In fact, she suggests relying on earthly skills and resources, in order to avoid the threat that hampers the betrothed’s projects and ambitions.

Renzo, instead, as we saw in Chapter Two, appears in all his juvenile omnipotence as he ignores Lucia’s words and is determined to fight oppression, forgetting to submit to divine intervention. Renzo’s search for an earthly and immediate justice, which takes up most of his

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<sup>394</sup> Ulivi, *Manzoni, storia e provvidenza*, p. 176.

<sup>395</sup> Roger Perron, *La Pratique de la psychologie clinique* (Paris: Dunod, 1997), p. 225.

physical journey, accompanies him throughout the novel, always confirming the impossibility of actually obtaining it. Examples of Renzo's confidence in a lawful, worldly righteousness are found in his orchestration of the surprise wedding at Don Abbondio's house during the night of 'intrigue and subterfuge' (p. 161), when the young man claims 'justice'll be done, and it'll be done by me!' (p. 125); in Renzo's words of exaltation at the Full Moon Inn after the bread riots, 'Oggi s'è visto chiaro che, a farsi sentire, s'ottiene quell che è giusto' (p. 232; 'Now, we've seen today that if you speak up you get your rights', p. 265); in Renzo's thirst for revenge against Don Rodrigo when he has learned that Lucia is at the Lazzaretto 'È venuto un tempo che gli uomini s'incontrino a viso a viso: e [...] la farò io giustizia!' (p. 591; 'It's time now for men to meet each other face to face [...] and then justice'll be done – by me!', p. 660). Through these quotes it is possible to perceive how Renzo's idea of justice is characterised by violence and force, especially in his murderous thoughts against Don Rodrigo. In fact, as supported by Pierantonio Frare, Renzo thinks he is searching for justice, while what he is truly trying to find is revenge; by killing Don Rodrigo, the young man would only obtain vengeance, the exact antithesis of justice, the precise action which hampers the possibility of achieving justice in the future, and that would make Renzo not too dissimilar from his enemy.<sup>396</sup> We must remember, that in his immediate search for a self-achieved justice, Renzo as well has used force against another human being, more specifically Don Abbondio. The young man has threatened the curate into telling him the person who has caused the cancellation of his wedding 'le prometto che fo uno sproposito, se lei non mi dice subito il nome di colui' (p. 32; 'I'll promise you one thing – I shall do something I'll be sorry

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<sup>396</sup> Pierantonio Frare 'La via stretta. Vendetta, giustizia e perdono nei *Promessi sposi*', in *Giustizia e Letteratura*, ed. by Gabrio Forti, Claudia Mazzucato, Arianna Visconti (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2014), p. 44. On Renzo's idea of revenge/justice see also Elli, 'Di Lucia e della giustizia', p. 12.

for if you don't tell me who it is at once', p. 52), and, as we have already seen, he has also entered unlawfully the priest's house to surprise him and coerce him into marrying him and Lucia. Although, Renzo is the true victim in the story, by using violence and by seeking revenge, in my opinion he seems to shift from a position of victim to that of a perpetrator.<sup>397</sup>

In the novel, the only person who can change Renzo's concept of justice is Father Cristoforo, a man, as we saw, who, paraphrasing Luciano Parisi, in his past had achieved what he believed to be justice with 'unjust' methods, namely by killing his enemy.<sup>398</sup> When at the lazaretto, Renzo meets Father Cristoforo and restates his intention of murdering Don Rodrigo if Lucia was dead; the capuchin realises that hate pervades the young man who appears to have lost his faith in God and in His superior justice, and declares:

Ho odiato anch'io: io che t'ho ripreso per un pensiero, per una parola, l'uomo c'io odiavo cordialmente, che odiavo da gran tempo, io l'ho ucciso. (...) Ma sai tu cosa puoi fare? Puoi odiare, e perverti; puoi, con un tuo sentimento, allontanar da te ogni benedizione. Perché, in qualunque maniera t'andassero le cose, qualunque fortuna tu avessi, tien per certo che tutto sarà gastigo, finchè tu non abbia perdonato in maniera da non poter mai più dire: "io gli perdono" (p. 593).

I too hated a man. Though I've reproved you for a mere thought, a mere word, what did I do to the man I'd hated with all my heart for many years? I killed him. (...) But do you know what you can do? You can hate your neighbour and lose your soul. By indulging that one feeling you can lose all hope of God's blessing. For however things

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<sup>397</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>398</sup> Luciano Parisi, *Come abbiamo letto Manzoni: interpreti novecenteschi* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2008), p. 202.



go with you hereafter, whatever fortune may befall you, you can be sure that everything will be as a punishment to you until you forgive him to such good purpose that you can never say again, “I’ll forgive him now!” (p. 662).

This passage that we already quoted in the previous chapter, is worth repeating here as it provides Manzoni’s accent on the importance of the connection between justice and forgiveness in his idea of a ‘modern and meditated Catholicism’.<sup>399</sup> From the capuchin’s words it is possible to understand that for Manzoni the notion of justice is strictly related not only to a patient faith in God and his divine providence, but also to another important Christian principle, forgiveness. As Frare claims, Cristoforo is not telling Renzo that he must renounce his rights, but rather that he must renounce to affirm them with violence and force, reiterating in this way a vision of the world fixed and cleaved between suffering and inflicting sufferings on others.<sup>400</sup> As we claimed in the previous chapter, Cristoforo is a father figure for Renzo, and a person whose opinion the young man has in high regard, a person who has killed but has asked and received forgiveness for this act. In fact, after the capuchin has narrated his own example of revenge-achieved justice, Renzo restores his faith and not only does he forgive Don Rodrigo but he also blesses him ‘e giunte le mani, chinò il viso sopra di esse e pregò’ (p. 594; ‘and he put his hands together, bowed his head, and began to pray’, p. 664). Therefore, according to Raimondi, Renzo is able to finally understand that forgiveness and faith in God alleviate life’s sufferings in this world, and produce justice.<sup>401</sup> At the

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<sup>399</sup> Fabio Danelon, ‘La vitalità di Renzo. Pier Paolo Pasolini e Alessandro Manzoni’, *Testo*, 74 (2017), 77-99 (p. 77).

<sup>400</sup> Frare, ‘La via stretta’, p. 54.

<sup>401</sup> Raimondi, *Il romanzo senza idillio*, p. 272.

lazaretto, Renzo's journey in search of justice can terminate.<sup>402</sup> In fact, the young man is no longer similar to Don Rodrigo, he appears to be no longer linked to the tyrant in a stagnant relationship of violence and hate, and for this reason he can move forward; from a social and religious point of view, he is rewarded by finding Lucia, and can hope for eternal salvation.<sup>403</sup> While, from a psychodynamic point of view as we said he finally moves towards the establishment of a new family system.

Nevertheless, in *I promessi sposi*, the problem of injustice and violation of rights, in this world, is never truly resolved. Neither Don Rodrigo, nor the Unnamed, nor the *bravi* are prosecuted for their actions, and the only justice that seems to be present in the region is not the secular option but the divine. Don Rodrigo and his bravo Griso are fatalities in the providential plague the 'scopa' (p. 633; 'broom', p. 706), while the Unnamed, who thanks to Lucia finds his faith in God, is not punished for his life-long crimes, as he asks forgiveness and renounces his old lifestyle to do good for those in need. However, at the end of the novel, Manzoni presents an earthly reward for Renzo and Lucia. The newly-wed settle in Bergamo, leaving Lombardy behind. According to Hal Gladfelder, 'their crossing into a new territory suggests that the old order cannot be altered, but only abandoned'.<sup>404</sup> In the free Republic of Venice, Renzo improves his social status by becoming co-owner of a small factory with his cousin Bortolo. Furthermore, Renzo supports a cultural promotion by having all his children educated in reading and writing, to prevent them from being defenceless, as he has been, when facing the corruption of the world.

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<sup>402</sup> Frare, 'La via stretta', p. 52.

<sup>403</sup> Giorgio Barberi Squarotti, *Il romanzo contro la storia* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1980), p. 50.

<sup>404</sup> Hal Gladfelder, 'Seeing Black: Alessandro Manzoni between Fiction and History', *MLN*, 108 (1993), 59-86 (p. 65).

Hourdequin, in *La Terre* cannot fulfil his capitalist dreams because the region rejects such modernity. Correspondingly, Lombardy likewise does not allow social amelioration because, as already stated, it is a region closed to capitalistic influences. Unlike Zola however, Manzoni supports Renzo's social promotion to the point of letting him exit the region and elevating him from silk-spinner to small-scale entrepreneur. Historian Alberto Asor Rosa claims that class advancement equals nation development and vice versa, and with Renzo's social amelioration Manzoni seems to support the advent of the middle class in Italy and a consequent modernisation for the peninsula.<sup>405</sup> In support of the concept that change can only concretise outside the region, we must remember the scene of the couple's wedding. As a gesture of reconciliation, Don Rodrigo's heir invites Renzo and Lucia to celebrate their wedding by having lunch at his castle, setting up a feast in the wing reserved for the help and underlining one final time the immutable social difference between rich and poor in a region where little changes.

Undoubtedly, compared to *La Terre* and *The Return of the Native*, the ending of *I promessi sposi* appears to be a traditional 'happy ending' as also declared by its author in a letter to the Stampa:

Sarò probabilmente criticato di aver diminuito l'effetto della fine del romanzo continuando a descrivere la vita dei due sposi. Ma anche a me piace di più il lieto fine, e non ho potuto trattenermi dalla tentazione di stare un pò ancora in compagnia dei miei burattini

I will probably be criticised to have diminished the effect of the novel's ending by carrying on with the depiction of the betrothed's life. But I too prefer a happy ending,

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<sup>405</sup> Alberto Asor Rosa, *Scrittori e popolo, scrittori e massa* (Turin: Einaudi, 2015), p. 215.

and I couldn't help myself from staying a little bit longer in the company of my puppets.<sup>406</sup>

However, the ending is not simply 'happy' and although it is set in a regional space, it is far from idyllic. In fact, as reported by Baldi earlier on in this section on the Italian novel, for Manzoni, after the 'original fall', there seems to be no longer the possibility for men to return to an idyllic way of life.<sup>407</sup> Men, for Manzoni, can only hope to achieve a state of quiet and ordinary happiness. For this reason, the scholarly panorama has debated vastly and thoroughly on the negativity provided by the novel's ending and the evident lack of idyll.<sup>408</sup>

It is possible to immediately claim that the ending of the novel is far from idyllic as it does not seem to provide that return to a primordial way of living, and that recreation of a pure and far world typical of idyllic scenes. Instead, Renzo and Lucia go back to their native village, only to leave it again for the more economically prosperous Bergamo. According to Raimondi, the idyll is men's irresistible tendency to an ideal state of order, balance and tranquillity in which they do not feel contradiction between a possible fate and the real one. Therefore the presence of an economical and social development for Renzo, and consequently his family, contrasts to the typical bucolic idyll, made of ploughing and farming in

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<sup>406</sup> Ulivi, *Manzoni, storia e provvidenza*, p. 163. The translation is my own.

<sup>407</sup> Consult Baldi p. 233.

<sup>408</sup> On the 'happy ending' as a return to a mundane life compare Squarotti, *Il romanzo contro la storia*, p. 55. On the bleak ending of the novel and the refusal of idyll see Raimondi, *Il romanzo senza idillio*, pp. 220-222. Compare also Claudio Varese, *L'originale e il ritratto, Manzoni secondo Manzoni* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1975), p. 30. Gino Tellini, *Manzoni* (Rome: Salerno, 2007), p. 37. See Ghidini, 'Bassani e Manzoni', p. 121. On the 'soft and realistic' idyll consult Danelon, 'La vitalità di Renzo', p. 84.

uncorrupted environments, as it symbolises change, development and modernity.<sup>409</sup> Furthermore, as supported by Giorgio Barberi Squarotti, after the couple has visited the houses of powerful warlords, the cities where history is made, after they have suffered injustice, it appears no longer possible for Renzo and Lucia to re-enter the routine of the village's closed space.<sup>410</sup> Here, famine and plague had destroyed that solidarity between community members, which characterised it at the beginning as it is clear when Renzo learns how people, in his absence, used his lot of land to chop wood 'povera vigna! Per due inverni di seguito, la gente del paese era andata a far la legna "nel luogo di quell poverino", come dicevano' (p. 555; 'What a pitiful sight! For two winters the villagers had come and cut firewood in "the poor young fellow's place", as they called it', p. 621).

In addition, the novel seems to lack an idyllic conclusion also due to a number of events central in the last pages. We must pay attention to the fact that Father Cristoforo dies at the lazaretto as he is aiding the sick, while Don Abbondio, in the safety of his house, lives on, and is in a way rewarded by Don Rodrigo's death as he no longer feels threatened by the tyrant. Don Abbondio, in contrast to Renzo and Lucia, has not changed, the famine and plague have not moved him, and he, as soon as he learns of the arrival of Don Rodrigo's heir, befriends him with 'obedience' (p. 710). The curate, who spends his life tending only to the protection and the safeguard of the self and who only awaits an earthly reward, survives.<sup>411</sup> Father Cristoforo, a man who has been, throughout the novel, the emblem of charity and

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<sup>409</sup> Raimondi, *Il romanzo senza idillio*, p. 221.

<sup>410</sup> Squarotti, *Il romanzo contro la storia*, p. 73.

<sup>411</sup> Eraldo Bellini, 'L'idillio imperfetto', in *Questo matrimonio non s'ha da fare: lettura dei 'Promessi sposi'*, ed. by Paola Fandella, Giuseppe Langella and Pierantonio Frare (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2005), pp. 163-180 (p. 164).

benevolence, dies.<sup>412</sup> This narrative choice undoubtedly casts a bleak, however realistic, shadow on the ending. The bitterness linked to Father Cristoforo's death is enhanced in the scene of the protagonists' wedding. Instead of reporting the cheerful dialogues and inner thoughts of the young couple, that is finally married, Manzoni describes the grief they feel for the absence of the late Father Cristoforo, rendering the scene all but idyllic.

Accennerò soltanto che, in mezzo all'allegria, ora l'uno, ora l'altro motive più d'una volta, che, per compir la festa, ci mancava il povero padre Cristoforo. "Ma per lui", dicevan poi, "sta meglio di noi sicuramente" (p. 639).

I will only say that, in the midst of all their happiness, first one of them and then another mentioned that the party was not and could not be complete without poor Father Cristoforo. 'But then there's no doubt that he's in a better place than we are', they added (p. 713).

Another example of sorrow in the final pages is found when Renzo and Lucia leave their village. Although this time they do it willingly, as no one is threatening them, the departure is not carried out without pain, as it is evident in the image of the baby and the nurse we saw in Chapter Two. Manzoni uses the symbolism of the infant who, crying, separates from the nurse's bosom, because bitter with wormwood, to render the painful break from the original unity and the loss of what we might identify as the motherland. However, even when in Bergamo, the idyll is nowhere to be found. In fact, as soon as Renzo and Lucia arrive, the young man suffers the people's gossip against his wife's appearance. So he decides to move one more time to another village, where Lucia is finally appreciated. Although they

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<sup>412</sup> Tellini, *Manzoni*, p. 220.

settle down and start a large family, the author communicates that even here there were problems ‘Non crediate però che non ci fosse qualche fastidiuccio anche lì’ (p. 643; ‘But of course there were some minor troubles even in the new place’, p. 718). Manzoni concludes his novel with the image of a man who is uncomfortable in his bed and envies everyone else’s, but that as soon as he changes it, the new one starts to become uncomfortable as well.<sup>413</sup> This metaphor of life as provider of a sense of precariousness, uncertainty, emptiness and dissatisfaction, sanctions one final time not only the absence of the idyll but also the author’s firm belief in the impossibility for men to find perfect, durable and permanent happiness.<sup>414</sup> Finally we can argue, as supported by Baldi and Squarotti, that *I promessi sposi* has not an idyllic ending, but indeed a happy one as the mundane way of life is restored once all the agonies, troubles, worries and sad times are over.<sup>415</sup> I terminate this analysis of the scholarly panorama on the ending of *I promessi sposi* following my psychodynamic interpretation of the novel. From this point of view, the ending is in my opinion positive, as we have seen, because it allows an individualisation and a social and economical promotion. The positivity of the ending is found in the idea that Renzo shifts from a condition of employed worker in a company of which he is not the owner, to co-owning a small factory with his cousin, in a sense becoming, as suggested by Ulivi, a budding bourgeois and capitalist.<sup>416</sup>

In conclusion, the couple separates both psychologically and physically from their native region, thus completing their evolutionary and individualising process, which started

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<sup>413</sup> Manzoni, *I promessi sposi*, p. 644. *The Betrothed*, p. 718.

<sup>414</sup> Ulivi, *Manzoni, storia e provvidenza*, p. 166.

<sup>415</sup> Baldi, *I promessi sposi*, p. 122. Squarotti, *Il romanzo contro la storia*, p. 55. On the positivity of the ending see also de Castris, *L’impegno del Manzoni*, p. 238.

<sup>416</sup> Ulivi, *Manzoni, storia e provvidenza*, p. 181.

with Lucia's famous 'Addio, monti' (p. 137; 'Farewell, you mountains', p. 164). As Salvatore Nigro has argued, similarly to Asor Rosa, the betrothed's trajectory embodies Manzoni's social hypothesis for the Italian peninsula: they are at a crossroads between feudal and bourgeois society, propelled forward by personal initiative and skills but still anchored to a deeply religious worldview.<sup>417</sup> Unlike Zola and Hardy, Manzoni includes within the boundaries of Lombardy the almost total historical reality of the seventeenth century from the point of view of the economy, politics, society and religion. He does so in order to expose the negative consequences of the Spanish domination in the region in the form of poverty, backwardness, famine, a corrupt legal system and a lack of class mobility. His own vision, however, is split between a Christian spirit of forbearance and a more active, forward-looking belief in the power of rational thought and human agency.

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<sup>417</sup> Salvatore Nigro, *Manzoni* (Rome: Editori Laterza, 1978), p. 163. Asor Rosa, *Scrittori e popolo*, p. 215.



### Conclusions

In this thesis I have investigated the concept and representation of the region as a geographical, social and political space in the nineteenth-century European novel. The study is grounded in a comparative analysis of key texts from the Italian, British and French literary canon: *I promessi sposi*, *The Return of the Native* and *La Terre*. I have focused on the representative values of the region and the different functions it fulfils in each novel's plot. This dissertation presents an original interpretation of regional literary spaces in light of Salvador Minuchin's family system theory, which to my knowledge has never been attempted before now. This innovative approach allowed me to establish that the territories taken into consideration show a well-defined psychodynamic dimension and can behave as a functional or dysfunctional system in that they display traits of either or both types. To my mind, the pivotal contribution of this thesis to scholarship on regionalist literature, nineteenth-century studies and literary geography more generally is its overturning of the traditional understanding of the region as an inactive background, which scholars such as Tim Cresswell, Keith Snell and Peter Brand still perpetuate. Far from being static and cut-off from the wider world, I have shown that regional space is a highly articulated and dynamic system with multiple interpersonal, political and historical dimensions, and a rich soil in which complex narratives can prosper.<sup>418</sup> I have focused on the trope of the journey, an aspect which in regard to regional environments has hitherto received little attention, to foreground the narrative

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<sup>418</sup> Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 17 and 39. Snell, *The Regionalist Novel in Britain and Ireland*, p. 1. Brand, 'Regionalismo e realismo', p. 3.

dynamism of this literary space. I see my research as laying the foundations for a new interpretation of regional spaces in nineteenth-century literature, no longer fixed, stagnant and immobile – as defined by the dominant scholarly discourse on literary regionalism – but as entities endowed with an entropic energy in constant transformation.<sup>419</sup>

My comparative analysis confirmed the limitations of the celebratory mode of regionalist writing and revealed how literature about the region does not always conform to the idyllic mode famously adopted, among others, by George Sand.<sup>420</sup> Lombardy, Egdon Heath and La Beauce are not seen as pure and uncorrupted environments from whence inhabitants do not wish to depart because they are ideal places to live. On the contrary, my Minuchian reading highlights that the characters are often unable to abandon the region because of their pathological relations and bonds with one another, and with the space itself. In addition, I have investigated the region as a socio-cultural system in relation to the historical and political contexts of the time and not simply as repositories of folklore, devoted to the jealous conservation of traditions. I was able to determine how national and transnational events and phenomena always produce some resonance within the regions, even within the most rigidly closed ones, triggering an internal movement or reaction. This movement always produces a number of reverberations across the system, which result in re-adaptation in order to maintain its internal balance.

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<sup>419</sup> The concept of the region's immobility is found in Dainotto, *Place in Literature*, pp. 23, 29.

<sup>420</sup> The 'idyllic region' is in Robert Godwin-Jones, *Romantic Vision: The novels of George Sand* (Birmingham: Summa, 1995), p. 190.

In Chapter One I established a connection between region and family, examining the regional space in the light of Ludwig von Bertalanffy's systemic theories, which the Argentinian psychiatrist Salvador Minuchin adapted to the field of systemic-relational family psychotherapy. This approach enabled me to identify important areas of contact between the psychological and psychodynamic structures underlying family life, and the social and cultural norms that produce nineteenth-century regional space, including limits and borders, internal mobility, interpersonal relations and between individuals and communities and their environment. Interestingly, I discovered a number of significant and pertinent traits common to both the region and the family: an example for all is the term 'boundary' which can be used equally to delimit the extension of a territory and to circumscribe the family's environment. My interpretation thus moved away from a simplistic understanding of region as a conservative geographical entity, to a more elaborate conceptualisation according to which the territorial/familial system is not the summation of single units, but results from the interactions of its members who communicate, organise, establish common regulations and possess – or not – the resilience to any modification of its internal equilibrium. Consequently, as part of this chapter, I considered the trope of the journey, understood from both a physical point of view as a movement from one place to another, and from a psychological point of view as a process of growth and individual development connected to the natural separation from one's original environment.

Chapter Two examines in more detail the metaphorical correspondence between region and family in La Beauce, Egdon Heath and Lombardy using the different types of family systems theorised by Minuchin, in a constant zooming of photographic lenses from a microcosmic level, which is the family *stricto sensu* as represented in the novels, to a macrocosmic one, namely the regional territory in which these families live and interact. Furthermore, I showed that mobility within and beyond the region becomes the major

variable in determining whether familial and regional systems can be seen as functional or dysfunctional. On the one hand, mobility in La Beauce and Egdon Heath is confined to the internal space of the region and is limited to disconnected, hectic and uneasy movements. The rigid, slightly permeable borders of these two environments only temporarily allow locals to leave and outsiders to enter, in order to maintain unchanged their internal homeostasis. This context impairs the characters' separation and individualisation, and the resulting macrocosmic system is dysfunctional, more precisely disengaged in *La Terre* and enmeshed in *The Return of the Native*. The journey in La Beauce acquires an emblematic value if we bear in mind Old Fouan's loss of autonomy in his roaming from one son to another. From a microscopic point of view, his journey takes on a regressive connotation, and its only possible conclusion is the final return 'inside' the so-long-desired and loved earth. From a macroscopic point of view, no longer owner of any land, Fouan loses his bond with the regional territory. Therefore the disengaged system of La Beauce recognises him as a stranger and metaphorically expels him. Compared to both *La Terre* and *I promessi sposi*, in *The Return of the Native* the theme of the journey is less legible. Despite the fact that Eustacia and Wildeve, the non-natives of the region, are devoured by the desire to escape from the rural Egdon to the city, the enmeshed regional macrocosm acts as a dysfunctional system with confused and almost impermeable borders, preventing and punishing any attempt to leave its territory. Clym's return, the native of the title, to his home in Egdon demonstrates the attractive, centripetal force the region exercises. Similarly to Fouan, Clym begins a sort of regressive journey, which instead throughout the novel acquires a cathartic value with the function of reinstating him as a native in his macrocosm.

On the other hand, the permeability of Lombardy's borders allows Manzoni's humble protagonists to leave their original environment and create a new family system elsewhere. Thus, Manzoni's Lombardy is what Minuchin would call a 'functional system' in that it

ensures not only outward movement, but also psychological growth through a series of obstacles and difficulties leading up to the final achievement of autonomy. An example of this process is Renzo's journey, a true regional odyssey on foot, which underlines the hardship and pain connected to growth. At the end of the novel, as an allegorical seal of his obtained maturity, Renzo is rewarded, in that he crosses the Lombard borders and is given the opportunity to settle down in another region.

To add a further layer of complexity to my study on the functional and dysfunctional behaviours of family and region, I found it necessary to verify how the two spaces relate to the sphere of the nation state, especially since the novel genre, according to Timothy Brennan, is often connected to the nation.<sup>421</sup> The relationship between novel and nation-state, according to Brennan, therefore survives as specific sets of problems afflicting the nations reverberates in the regional microcosms of the novels, which does not appear isolated and uncorrupted as in traditional regionalist narratives. For this reason, Chapter Three takes a different perspective and looks at the political, economic and social aspects of regional life and history in the three national contexts of France, Britain and Italy. Here, I contest traditional visions in both literary and cultural discourse of the region as a static entity in time and space. The very etymology of the term 'region', in fact, discloses the deep political implications – such as administrative autonomy and decision-making power – of this concept, especially in Italy and France. This agrees with my finding that far from being impermeable to current political and historical phenomena, La Beauce, Egdon Heath and Lombardy are shaped by the impacts of capitalism, social change and ideology as much as the national and global spaces to which they seem opposed. The novel that tackles socio-political and economic issues most explicitly is *I promessi sposi*, since seventeenth-century Lombardy is not a region on the periphery of a

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<sup>421</sup> Concept explained in Chapter One, Brennan, *Salman Rushdie and the Third World*, p. 12.

larger nation, but a state in its own right. The historical dimension allows Manzoni to explore complex issues of foreign domination, international trade and the real-life consequences of economic and social policies. If Zola and Hardy, albeit in different ways, provide a critique of capitalism, in my opinion Manzoni hopes – or at the very least yearns – for a free market. His emphasis on the disastrous consequences of tariffs and on the positive impact of small industrial enterprise is evidence of this notion. In support of this, Alberto Mingardi has written ‘Manzoni believed in free trade. He understood that goods will flow either “with the favour of the law, with flying colours, in the light of the sun” or “in spite of the law, under the guise of smuggling, under the shine of the moon”’.<sup>422</sup>

*La Terre* is Zola’s great study of agrarian capitalism. Even in the rural world of La Beauce, the author finds traces of alienation and individualism, which Marx theorised as the defining traits of labour under the capitalist mode of production. In La Beauce, Hourdequin embodies the figure of the new entrepreneur who aims to challenge the market through technological innovation. The failure of his project is the result of both Zola’s aversion to capitalism and of the regional community’s aim to defend and not to alter its internal status quo, maintaining it as being polarised on a local economy. Of all three novels taken into consideration herein, *The Return of the Native* represents the region with the most impenetrable borders. Facts and events taking place on a national level are felt in Egdon only as a distant echo, and even major events of the recent past, such as the Napoleonic Wars, elicit little reaction or reflection; Grandfer Cattle, for instance, simply mentions them as a sentimental memory of his younger days. After all, this attitude is in line with the inward-looking attitude produced by the entangled trait of the system. Furthermore, even the passing of time tends to confirm this aspect of closure and indifference to the outside world. I have shown how, in Egdon, time is unrushed and measured by natural events, in opposition to the

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<sup>422</sup> Alberto Mingardi, ‘Manzoni’s Unfulfilled Legacy’, p. 37.

fast-paced, mechanical clock time that regulates modern city life. Hardy's novel is undoubtedly the one unfolding the most explicit regionalist themes, proof of which can be identified in his defence of the rural community's purity and his rejection of a society divided into classes as the Industrial Revolution unfolds. Consequently, I have demonstrated that any attempt at class mobility in the region is inhibited; in fact, outsiders such as the townspeople Eustacia and Wildeve, who, through their personal ambition, threaten to corrupt the homogeneity of regional society, face an adverse fate. I have demonstrated furthermore how the scarce evidence of religiosity detected in the regional communities of both Zola and Hardy, is attributed to the Church's loss of influence on a national level in nineteenth century France and Britain. The Beaucerons' altercations with the ecclesiastical figures at the end of religious functions, and the Egdonites' lack of enthusiasm for attending Sunday Mass, underline not only the lack of religious sentiment, but also the Church's failure in its traditional role as a centre of community life.

This thesis can be seen as an original contribution to scholarship in another key respect. Instead of concentrating on standard regionalist literature, I have analysed in a regionalist perspective three novels whose authors, with the partial exception of Hardy, are not generally considered in the scholarly panorama as *vexilliferi* of regionalist literature. Nevertheless, the three texts treat many themes representative of regionalism such as: a rural setting, the focus on the most humble aspects of everyday life, the emphasis on specific regional customs and traditions, together with a sense of spatial limitation and territorial closure, the always perceptible presence of boundaries that tend to hamper an outward view, the profound sense of belonging to the rural territory which becomes almost total enmeshment, and the apparent stagnation of time are factors that rendered possible the comparison of the three novels. In addition, it is evident that I chose to focus my study on the analysis of a specific literary genre, the novel, while regionalism is often associated with

shorter forms of narrative such as novella, sketches and the short story. I believe in fact that the extensive and realistic descriptions of both landscape and indoor spaces, and the accurate and thorough depictions of the characters and their relations provided in the narrative form of the novel guaranteed the ideal *pabulum* for my examination of the dynamics among individuals, and between individuals and territory.

The outcomes of this research offer a wide range of follow-ups and possibilities for expansion. It appears important to verify my original point of observation against other literary genres, such as, for example, short stories and poetry, and other spaces, such as the province or the city. In the field of European literature of the nineteenth century, I wish to look at the Italian tradition of the novella, a short narrative, for example in Giovanni Verga, Luigi Capuana and Grazia Deledda. In my opinion, with these authors, the analysis of the familial and regional space through my psychodynamic model can acquire a specific significance. What these authors present are not what we might consider ‘proper’ regions, i.e. territories adjoining other ones and all situated within the same nation, but islands, specifically Sicily in Verga and Capuana and Sardinia in Deledda. Islands are spaces geographically cut-off and remote because surrounded by the sea; they are consequently detached and isolated from the continent. For this reason, they have political, economic, social and linguistic local structures that often oppose external influences.

Another space, which it is possible to identify in the works of European authors such as Jane Austen, Elizabeth Gaskell and Stendhal to name only a few, is the province. In regard to this aspect, Franco Moretti generally describes the province through the concept of ‘lack’, as he states ‘the provinces are negative entities, defined by what is not there’.<sup>423</sup> It would be an important undertaking to examine how this concept of absence and deficiency echoes in

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<sup>423</sup> The definition of province appears in Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* (London: Verso, 2005), p. 53.



provincial life compared to the non-idyllic reality of the regions I studied, and to investigate whether the strong socio-cultural and political identification I found in Lombardy, La Beauce and Egdon Heath are traceable also in the provincial space. The province, I discovered, plays a distinctly pivotal role in a non-European context, specifically in Russian Literature. Similarly to what Moretti claims, Anne Lounsbery defines the Russian province in terms of what it is deprived of compared to the urban centre.<sup>424</sup> Paraphrasing Lounsbery, this idea of deficiency resonates also in provincial everyday life, thereby rendering its occurrences almost meaningless.<sup>425</sup> In fact, if Moscow and Petersburg represented the cultural, political and legislative centre, in opposition the provinces became empty spaces void of significance.<sup>426</sup> In Aleksandr Sergeevič Puškin's *Евгений Онегин*, *Eugene Onegin*, in fact, the author renders in verse the contrast between urban and provincial space, also highlighting the articulate relations between characters and the territory they inhabit. Puškin's long poem provides not only a different literary genre but also spaces other than the region. In this new concept of space and in this different literary genre, it will therefore be fundamental to examine the existence of boundaries and to study their permeability or rigidity. Furthermore, in *Eugene Onegin* is also present the trope of the journey.<sup>427</sup> After killing his neighbour in a duel, Onegin abandons the province to travel abroad. If, similarly to *I promessi sposi*, Onegin's journey begins as an escape from the difficulties at 'home', we shall recognise how this travelling does not acquire the sense of growth and individualisation we have discovered with

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<sup>424</sup> Anne Lounsbery, 'No, this is not the Provinces! Provincialism, Authenticity, and Russianness in Gogol's Day', *The Russian Review*, 64 (2005), 259-280 (p. 265).

<sup>425</sup> Anne Lounsbery, 'Dostoevskii's Geography: Centres, Peripheries, and Networks in *Demons*', *Slavic Review*, 66 (2007), 211-229 (p. 217).

<sup>426</sup> Ibid., p. 216.

<sup>427</sup> Aleksandr Sergeevič Puškin, *Eugene Onegin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

Renzo. The marked emphasis that I noticed Russian Literature appoints to families and provincial life complies fully with my specific interest in the light of Minuchin's family theories. In fact, I shall identify to what degree the psychodynamic reading I used in *I promessi sposi*, *The Return of the Native* and *La Terre* is applicable also to the analysis of provincial spaces in Russian literature, given the vastness and complexity of the Russian territory and the leading role often reserved for the depiction of families in Russian authors such as Nikolai Gogol, Ivan Turgenev and Sergei Aksakov. Moreover, I shall investigate the bond established between the province's macrocosm and the family's microcosm together with the type of role played in this non-European context by the earth. I will also verify the reliability of Anne Lounsbery's statement that affirms the presence of a weak bond between noblemen and their land, i.e. the presence overall of a poor sense of belonging to the provincial environment.<sup>428</sup>

I hope this doctoral project will contribute to a reassessment of the importance and complexity of the regional imagination in nineteenth-century European literature and beyond, and open new avenues for interdisciplinary research into the narrative production of social and psychological spaces and the way they mutually shape and are shaped by factors as different as interpersonal relations, politics and genre conventions.

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<sup>428</sup> Anne Lounsbery, 'No, this is not the Provinces!', p. 270.

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